Sulfur 26

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A GUEST, MARJORIE PERLOFF, **MICHAEL PALMER, & CLARK COOLIDGE** •
• **THE ANTHROPOLOGIST OF MYSELF BY GEORGE OPPEN** • TRANSLATIONS
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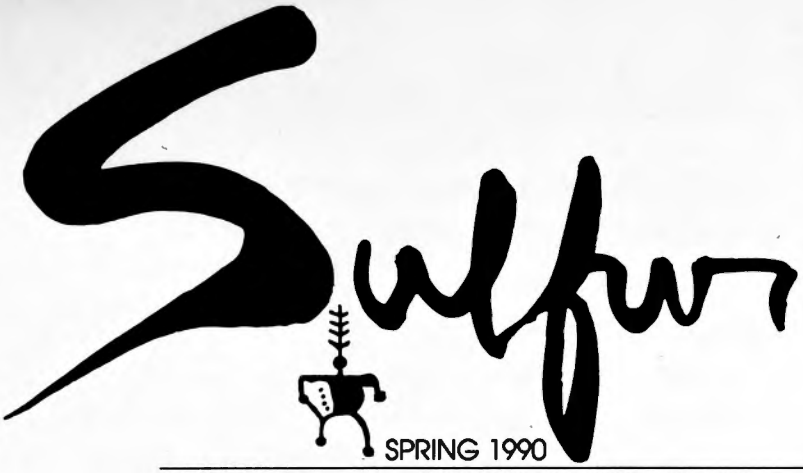

A LITERARY BI-ANNUAL OF THE WHOLE ART

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COVER : NORA JAFFE / Beyond With and Without; 102" x 84", acrylic on canvas, 1983 [Courtesy of Virginia Lust Gallery, NYC]

The writing by George Oppen comes from The Archive for New Poetry, at the University of California at San Diego. We gratefully acknowledge permission to publish this material.

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KAREN KELLEY

THE RED SNAKE WE WOKE

I remember falling upon, striking
the pulp of wood and rags, blood and grasses,
uncertain whether I was a blistering agent
or a small cavity. Twenty years later,
when I move my body, or part of my body,
sexual passion—that loupe, that exquisite
magnifying glass—is an adventure I am ashamed
of having wanted standing up!
I am not ashamed of the arrow-shaped leaves
or sticky spadix enclosed within the spathe,
since until this very moment I hadn't realized
that the minute, rudimentary sac, excited
among the dictionaries, sunlight clinging
to her behind by suction, was me.
Even then, I was open at both ends,
born on a dead-end street.

Into silence, sweet apples, and climbing plants
cultivated for their idyllic flowers
(time and place like a mounting for a jewel),
comes a horseman, a pleasing note in the chord.
Wither and fetlock, breast and flank in a line
follow the path of trees along the river at a little trot,
very slowly, a device for measuring.
The horseman turns lemon-scented clusters of flowers
into clear, resonant sounds by dancing his horse
in the impressions it's left in the north side
of the earth, in the very pattern itself.
The man might be a medicine man or devoted champion
of ladies (in either case, he has illicit goods:

a piece of cloth brilliant with light and luster
attached to his staff, and his horse is a rich brocade),
or a modern-day horseman—eroded, a coarse fabric,
a small tuft wrapped loosely around the hide of his animal,
smelling deliciously of a printed translation
of the dialogue, all hair removed.
Never once does he look at me.
I find him terribly seductive,
and know he is excited by me.

I see myself lying face down in submission and adoration
on an invented foundation of crushed rock
in the secluded bower. I don't excite or provoke,
don't convey a message, or turn my glance.
I always feel washed out by evening.
I am the innermost ring of a target spread out
and extending on all sides simultaneously—a measure
of grain, one leg of the carcass of an animal,
a watery layer of paint washing someone's hands,
a scullery maid. At the very center
I am a halting passage, a means of approaching
eight hallways—and at the end of any one of them
a pregnant room intended for general use,
responsive to the secrets of the Mediterranean.
I flow, sweep, beat with a lapping sound,
then lie down like paint on canvas, naked
on the bed, legs apart.
I am pure oxygen!
I am a gaping mouth offering unobstructed entrance
—gaps to the sky, spaces to the sea.

The official seat of authority: a boy with an erection
sensing by touch my hand, his organ
a spirally coiled shell, broad foot,
distinct head silky as velvet, ardent
as fresh wind—a veal loaf out of a domed nest
built of twigs and damp earth: I feel tremendous joy.
There is a great rush in my eyes.
His fibers contracting and relaxing seem to be there

only for the fruit of the matter at hand:
to flourish his construction
though the roots, leaves, and seeds are poisonous.
Falling on bent knees, chivalrously
he sets about to disembellish me.
His position, form, and configuration employ my eyes in seeing
that nothing will stop him, that what he is doing
is the exercise and enjoyment of a right,
needed to achieve certain results.

A regular rising and falling, like a red pigment
made from dried bodies of females, is transmitted
through my vent of an extinct volcano.
Nothing remains of its former glory,
nothing marks the loss of blood,
even when the regular rhythm becomes brutal
and I feel within me the cave-in of a feathery cluster
of pinkish flowers I never knew was there.

I never intended to expose my body to his
soft, fine hair, fur, wool.
In the spring, when the snow melts, numerous small beetles
portray stained glass windows in sharp, delicate relief,
and like a stone or metal slab
in which the impossible is arranged,
the unexpected meeting with my violation
always appears a likelihood, a probability,
something due me by tradition and nature.
How is it that at the appointed, fated moment
when false perceptions with a compelling sense of reality
unclothe themselves to me, I have not managed
to plug up the female side, which I still see
as a human figure with halo and wings, a little angel
acting in response to invasion
by gathering into clusters and glimmering faintly?

I came into contact with my father as much as I could
before a pain caused by strong guilt and embarrassment
caused me to bend forward and walk as if in descent.

Several months later, a large group of carnivorous
birds impaling their prey on sharp-pointed thorns
and barbs of wire fencing showered from the sky.

Who is it? Who's there?
(Who can it be knocking at my door?)
A tall, thin man with a white beard
and a blue swallow-tailed coat,
red-and-white-striped trousers,
and a tall hat with a band of stars?
A friend sharpened like the head of a spear,
rolling in a complete circle, head over heels?
I don't know.
In the center of the page, I am so lost
in motion, melting in order to determine
strength, effect, worth, and desirability,
so caught up in the tribal dance
that my vision runs lengthwise through the war paint.
I swing shut by my own weight unless held open,
sufficiently deep and wide to provide passage for vessels.
Some custom or principle keeps me from colliding
with large, creamy flowers, dense shrubbery,
ships, innocent swallows, shells: I am a shore,
a coastal region, a female child on a bed of roses,
the sheets of a sail beating rhythmically,
an image on a cross,
on a wall.

In heaven, something suggestive of an eye diverts notice
from a secluded threshold where glue, wax,
and clay dolls sit sprawled in specific order.
A wading bird resembling a stork, dozens of
tropical hummingbirds, plants prized as flavorings,
and climbing vines with yellowish flowers
are dying in the heather which gave way to a crust
of volcanic glass—and the illustration
showing parts in relationship to the whole
is in shadow.

Is the odor left by the passing of animals
in a place with perches for birds and foundlings
the native habitat of women?
The restful scene on the fabric is woven
of sustained, melodious songs of larks,
stamens and pistils enclosed in petals and sepals,
soft, moist, shapeless masses of apples,
nerves, blood vessels,
wood, paper, rags.
Does the tapestry represent a fertile green spot in the desert
or is it the brilliant, multicolored plumage of a small bird?
I no longer know how I got here,
who drove me from the open
into traps and nets.

The narrow body leads up to the room.

I remember the spearlike weapon
with its barbed head and thick, soft underfur,
the row of cut grain left to dry in a field,
the pin inserted into the loop in the rope
to prevent slipping, to tighten,
to hold.

In the little light remaining: an asphyxiating mixture
of names and fetal membranes,
a visual image or taste in the mouth that persists:
the strong, translucent skin of the lake,
the thick, edible root growing in moist ground.

The upper part of the glacier where snow turns to ice
like a nap worn down so the threads show through
is invested with the bodily form
of a fold of tissue: my emptiness
a deep fissure brought into being
when the delicately-flavored layer surrendered,
a broken bird of paradise
under the coarse blanket of ***man,***
leaving a trail of smoke, a path, channel, corridor

hereafter liable to wishes and desires
. . .to fingerings and penknives.

The cross can barely be made out through the fog.

Empty space, sound fading
into nothing, is too beautiful
for the being conceived as perfect,
omnipotent, omniscient originator
and ruler of the universe.

Daddy.

So happy I could cry every night
I regard with wonder the hard, dark tree,
the tusk, the bronze nails,
the twisting son
associated with a place and a cause.

Slim, pointed bronze nails penetrate
even as I watch His head start (startle)
to a more distant point in space and time
so as to be within (He prays) the skull.
He knows how to swim, to be bodily taken up
in the as-well-as-possible-under-the-circumstances
position—eyes, ears, nose, mouth, jaws
falling full tilt into the future,
His beard on the broken glass of His chest.

His main body, apart
from tributaries and appendages,
is so flimsy
curved bones raise a ridge in the fabric,
jutting outward like undernourished dogs sniffing
the anesthetic of wasted food.
And that demure fabric of matted natural fibers
placed upon, over, in front of (something)
so as to protect, shut in,

conceal—what a remarkable *be careful or else!*
Those beautiful legs; the unexplained secret unknown
tipped with a venomous sting behind the scrap of washcloth. . .
I don't linger to spread wishes or yearnings in that obsolete
girdle—and yet they make an opening,
ripping the branching, threadlike filaments
that form my gaze when I imagine
He greatly desires me.

To attend the entrance of another heavenly body above the
horizon
I lay open a small plot of land, a flowerbed,
and fasten shut with nails the tips of my fingers.
Then, sensitive as flesh under nails,
in a gesture of one current flowing across another
—a sort of pantomime
of controlling natural events and forces—
and with a single insult that cuts to the quick,
my body rolls in a complete circle, heels over head,
and I am beneath the surface of the open boat
which holds in its body the sugary smell of soiled clothes
and emotional involvement.
He is there too, wearing a beard, a gun,
wearing hollows in the stone steps, breaking down
resistance by relentless pressure,
striking with His open hand:
slap.

I am partial,
incomplete,
perched as a bird coming up for air,
furnishing excuses for sudden, strong, filthy
emotions as if displaying brightly-colored tropical fish,
their beautiful flattened bodies, my thin,
membranous wings.

It would not catch me unaware
if this wasted garden were revealed as hollow,

like the grooved teeth with which the snake injects its venom.
He would come out through a silvery-white, lustrous gate,
snarled in the long branches of trees.
He would have on his usual clothes, but,
in addition, he would have on his head brilliant,
threadlike antennae with scales, and on his back
four gauzy wings of lacy fabric covered with a thin layer of gold.

Intimating a covert meaning, his glance meant I had to wear
a gown of crisp, transparent fabric that trailed
behind like a retinue, in such a way
that my parts could be recognized at any time,
in any ceremony. Fading in the sun,
exhausting a hooked fish, giving birth,
engaging in the cries uttered by combatants,
moving rhythmically with my fiancé
at an inn for travelers, I had to fly the colors
of hidden fluctuations and variations.
That I was a female who performed various acts
was understood, emphasized
with daubs of a sticky, greasy substance
—and such words as *yolk sac, libido,* and *pinochle*
smeared the rest of their remarks.
I knew what they meant, so lowered my head
and left the table.

I didn't have something remarkable to perform on the girls
in my school, at any rate, not that sort of thing.
I didn't have on the red shoes, or the strip
of iron, rubber, or leather attached to the underside,
moving here and there, astir with the instinct.
Innocence was a fugue in the shape of a sharp, woody spine,
a corpse intended for study and dissection,
a word or phrase that denoted the door to that action
which attracted and frightened me enormously:
I never talked about it with anyone.

On all sides of me, radiant with color: uttered words of desire.
Within me, surrounding me with its soft skull,

was such an infant, its tender voice
a tepid presence for more than three years
riding between my thighs, like scrapings of a cavity
I had to regulate the flow of,
like wind through the muzzle
and into the top of the skull of a dog.

What I have referred to as the large, four-footed nature of my
mother
is not the fact that she feared an expulsion from the womb.
On the contrary: her shrub of profusely blooming pink flowers
protruding from a fleshy receptacle
consisted entirely in the intention to pursue her desire
to have, to possess, a handful of spewed-too-early limbs.
There are harvest times, bed times, when a woman
is not soft leather used for gloves or having a child,
not open to tenderness. In the garden
she persisted in causing a shadowy image (her hatred)
to appear upon the silvery surface (me)
when I was a bright red inner working inside her.
As conclusion to her recital, she chose
to utter the words of her wretched crime
—her weak heart, her feeble attempts to murder me.

An immense space, the fertile plot.
There were flowers, vegetables, and fruit for me to roam
as a ghost amid showy, colorful female parts,
there were parallel plantings of clipped shrubs,
and shady bowers (one in the form of a resting place
was overripe with vines with huge,
starlike, membranous flowers).
There were fragrant purple flowers that bloomed at night,
which the gardener plucked and wove into his hair
in the evening when he went out whoring.
This fertile, well-cultivated plot made a hole through me.
I chose as more desirable the plot that had weeds with broad
leaves
and spikes of greenish flowers, chose the waxy fats
and silky fibers of seed pods and mulch.

But to my mother, these spoors, these scents of the presence of life
meant only that she had not yet been able to kill the taste of meat.
Ah! What a nuisance! And it had gone on for so long:
minutes, hours, days, weeks, months.
There is so much tongue, uvula, epiglottis
to come into possession of, to know how to swim,
the little one who glides inside you.
Are there any deeper layers than these random walls
of vessel, artery, vein? Did each of my changes of position
among the innermost receptacles remind her
of the abhorrent boiling of skin, bones, and connective tissue
of which I was the instance, with no issue to the sea?

I don't know how I came to swim—a slender,
grooved lead bar guided to a target automatically—
in that boxlike compartment; a lid, a flap
of tissue covering erupting eyes and teeth.

I loved those remote, funnel-shaped mornings
within the body, cool hues of emerald less yellow
than that of growing grass, the light beginning to emerge.
I would lay bare fresh, untrained blossoms and leaflike organs
which the night had made ready for me.
Sometimes I would be in readiness for a week or more
for an odor of roses or new-mown hay.
Firmly self-contained at first, the slow waltz of unfolding
grew in deep shade, with a small opening at the top
to exhibit its pale corolla, still firmly rolled up,
erectile spine stuck with clinging seeds
and small prickly fruit.

Near the beginning of the course of events, upon rising,
nausea and vomiting falling in luxuriant folds,
my mother would make ready beforehand,
stretch out full length along the ground
beside a container of woven rushes and twigs,
and the pruning shears,

and we would move suddenly and involuntarily
into a rich, impossibly long-spined state of semiconsciousness:
When the snow melts, producing unstoppable holes,
we'll put you bluntly into the silvery slit trench,
and the dark pinks to purplish pinks
to moderate reds to purplish reds of your body that thrives
in deep shade beside the uproar of fruit trees
will conceal your edible flesh.
She reflected upon a jointed tool for disengaging obstructions,
even more fearful of her own depths than last year.

It was a ritual or test to which my mother and I were promised
—covered, stained with blood, encrimsoned.
A suggestive, covert business,
the most suggestive, perhaps.

I have no protective or concealing cover:
I am an open fire, open package,
the fixed, bony sockets of my skull
like buds on a twig or tuber.
Everything everywhere is at a little distance:
where there's smoke there should be. . .well,
the scapula, of course—fine bone,
divining rod—
used to express *if I should fall. . .*

My mother makes the characteristic cry
of a submissive animal
invoking heaven.
Poisonous.
She makes me think of the bursting forth
of large groups of fins, gills,
cartilaginous skeletons swimming together
in shallow waters,
turbulence in the atmosphere causing the sparkling
of lustrous white scales, a boiling
like the winging of birds' bodies unlocking
trails of smoke as they turn
in a threatening sky.

I see perfect, undiluted, red shining boats,
oars pulling against the flow of salt water,
sails pulled back, rolled, and tied
down like secrets. I see thickets
of swelling, turbulent yearning
—yes, I see that valuable sap.
The yellowish wax secreted
by the happiness I've been assured lies before me
goes raw again
as I look out the window with my mother
and see to the end of time the red snake we woke
whirling so high and far from yesterday
as it emerges from its egg
to ensanguine the entire land.

The areas of water devoted to breeding
are the cores of the world.

The gills and complex bodies forming this profusion of life
make slight, sharp, snapping noises
as they burn blue-black in the open recess
—nocturnal, luminous organs; fire opals;
my mother's poisonous words.
Ripening early in years, my wishes and dreams,
aimed straight at their targets and a little flustered,
came into view like planes appearing in the sky
by the simple fact of sight. What did it mean
that I was then singled out, understood to act
as a symbol of my father's teeth, hooves,
and routine functions? Who can tell
what she gained by telling me that the woman's robe
that frequents human dwellings
is a transmitter of disease?
Well, well, little girl,
having blue periods of blood and dead cells
means you can harbor flowers, boats
borne by the tides,
and children.

So that's where this argument
leads: I am a mirror all over.

What am I doing
tethered to this stake?

BARBARA GUEST

DEFENSIVE RAPTURE

Width of a cube spans defensive rapture
cube from blocks of liquid theme
phantom of lily stark—

in running rooms.

adoration of hut performs a clear function
illusive column extending dust
protective screen the red—

objects pavilion.

deep layered in tradition moonlight
folkloric pleads the rakish
sooted idiom supernatural—

diadem.

stilled grain of equinox
turbulence the domicile host
robed arm white crackled—

motives.

sensitive timbre with complex
astral sign open tent hermetic
toss of sand swan reeds—

torrents of unevenness.

surround a lusted fabric
hut sequence modal shy
as verdigris hallow force—

massive intimacy.

slant fuse the wived
mosaic a chamber astrakhan
amorous welding the sober—

descant.

turns in the mind bathes
the rapture bone a guardian
ploy indolent lighted—

strew of doubt.

commends internal habitude
bush the tidal roof
day stare gliding double—

measures.

qualms the weights of night
medusae raft clothed sky
radiant strike the oars—

skim cirrus.

evolve a fable husk
aged silkiness the roan
planet mowed like ears—

beaded grip.

supposes the hooded grass
numb moat alum trench a solemn
glaze the sexual estuary—

floats an edge.

MARTINE BELLEN

STORM

"As a child I lived in a small town. We always have a full moon. Every night after dinner, my friend and I gathered round the backyard to play. My favorite game was to play with my shadow. We used to punch the shadow against the wall and set fire to it. Even though I was told my shadow would come to haunt me, I still did it. I did it to find out if my shadow had more strength than me."

—Edelyne Gelin

Since the Big Boom we are but one sentence, an internal idea without pause, always a keeper of gaze and one for time, an eye in fantasy or we wouldn't dream what is most fearsome: the presentiment that there must be a realm which assumes a self-contained sister system and only one mirror image for each property, while I myself have found we are independent of one another; this I know as the object I am, and without truth-argument in common, we can be infinite and never cross the other's line, ignoring all words that aren't needed to assist our existence; yet if a union does occur, our multiplying thoughts aren't a casual nexus but imperatives in the midnight air with orris arising out from brick pouring open shadows we wrestle with corrected vision in space between story and its penumbra.

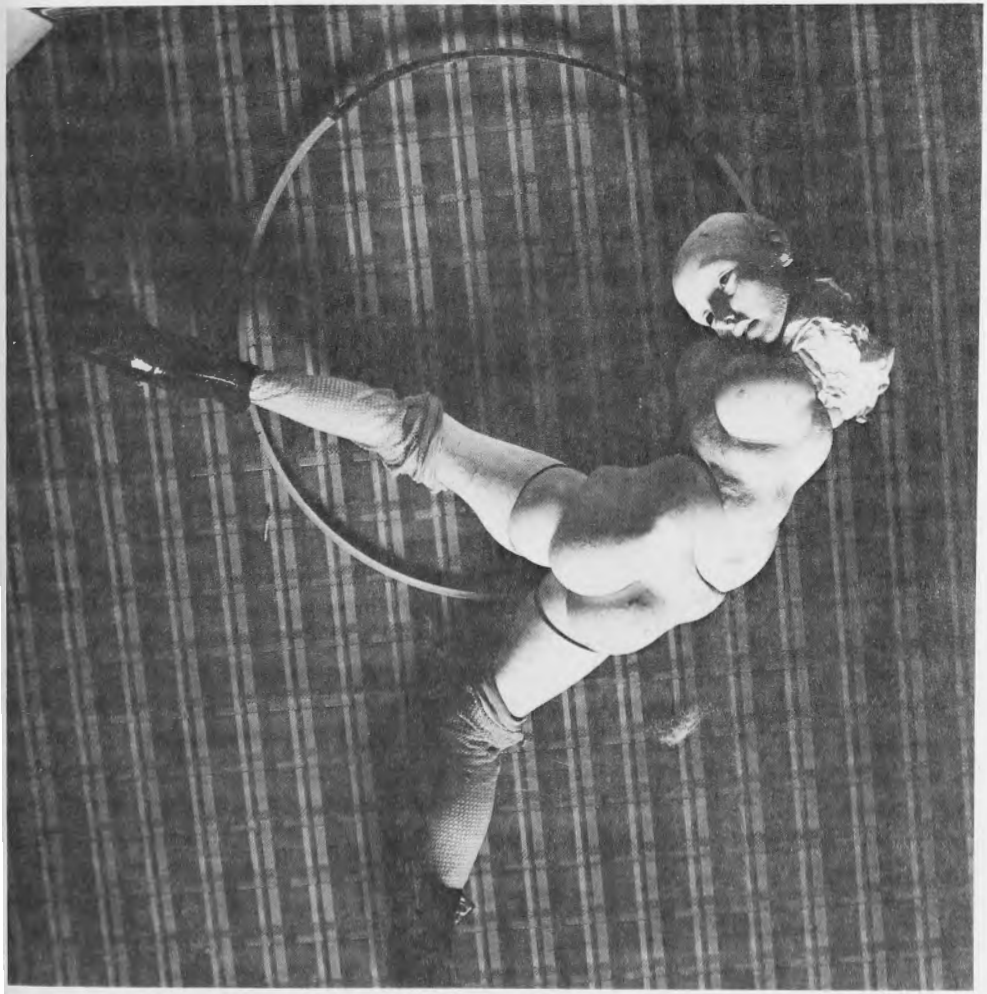
Her shadow she kept in seclusion to see without detail what seemed to make her more an object than a need of faith and hold heart to her ear. She saw herself blind, allowing fantasy the only eye that existed or there would be no sight so she said let it be that you shall see, and it saw her, and she would not have to be the camera of herself. Mostly in dreams she was disturbed for her eyes were shut and still she took notice—breast, vagina. Fog across the bathroom woman after storm; there is a reason in science why first she sees nothing, then slowly the cloud dissipates to find parts bare before her and others gone. To be blinded means not to have eyes hurt but to see something wrongly or to think you see one thing while an object from another dimension is before you. This she knows from her showers and can see as surely as God has sisters secluded with words while He basks in light and steam.

She ate clay tablets of Black Christ under streets to understand possession is occupation of land. Of thirsty roots the size of spreading loins and singing trees, the beetles come to take the song, to own their time, to see the storm approaching which wills no shadow.

During the total eclipse she became impregnated with spirit and struggled with that demon brought inside by storm; thus, the idea of quality perceived is determined from motion or again as an arc of points, but not borrowed toward moon. The form invoked involved in words exists as it is reflected subjectively—a girl and therefore in nature, though not necessarily contrary to His hypothesis of the thought He once was. They clasp and twirl gaining speed and loss and no one falls; some fail because the corm has more strength than we can conceive.

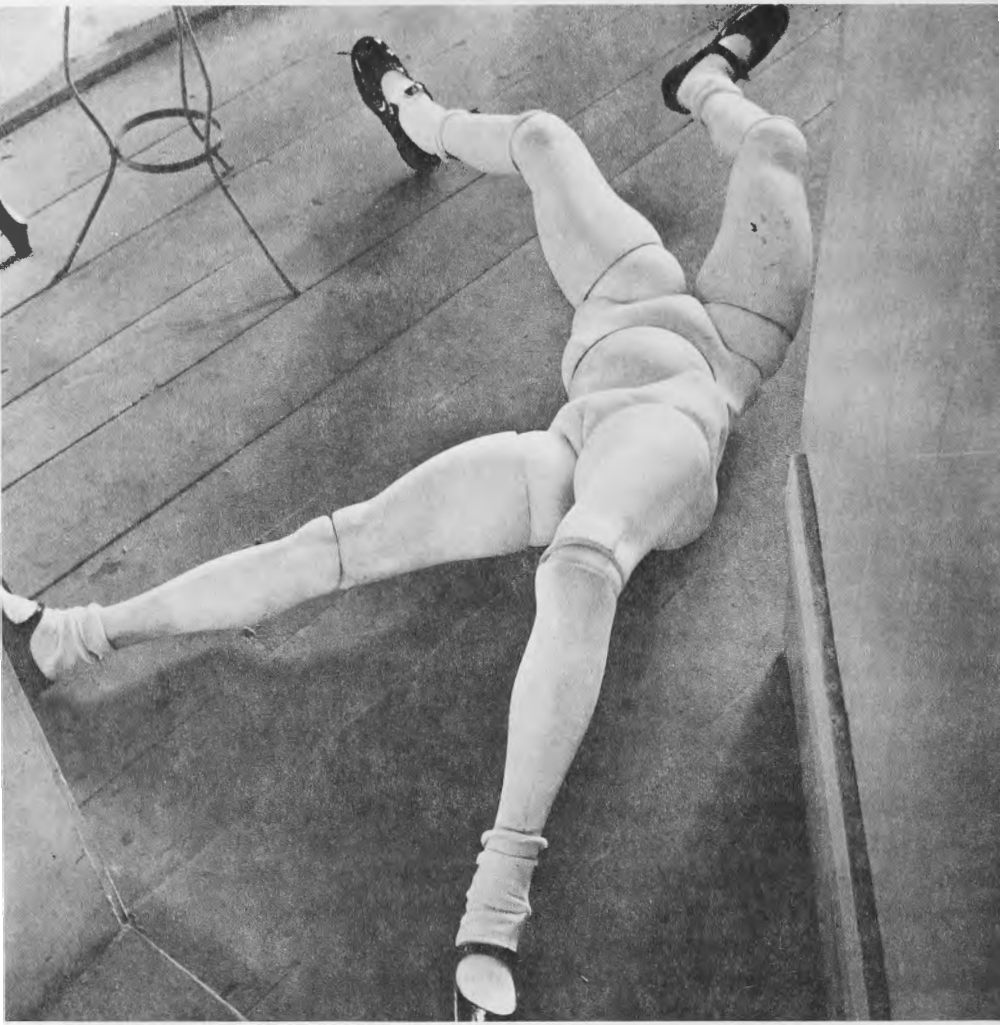
HANS BELLMER

FOUR PHOTOGRAPHS, THREE DRAWINGS, AND AN ETCHING



LA POUPEE

from 1935 and 1938 negatives, printed 1983, Edition Galerie Francois Petit Paris, 10" x 10". All Bellmer photographs courtesy of Virginia Lust Gallery, NYC.



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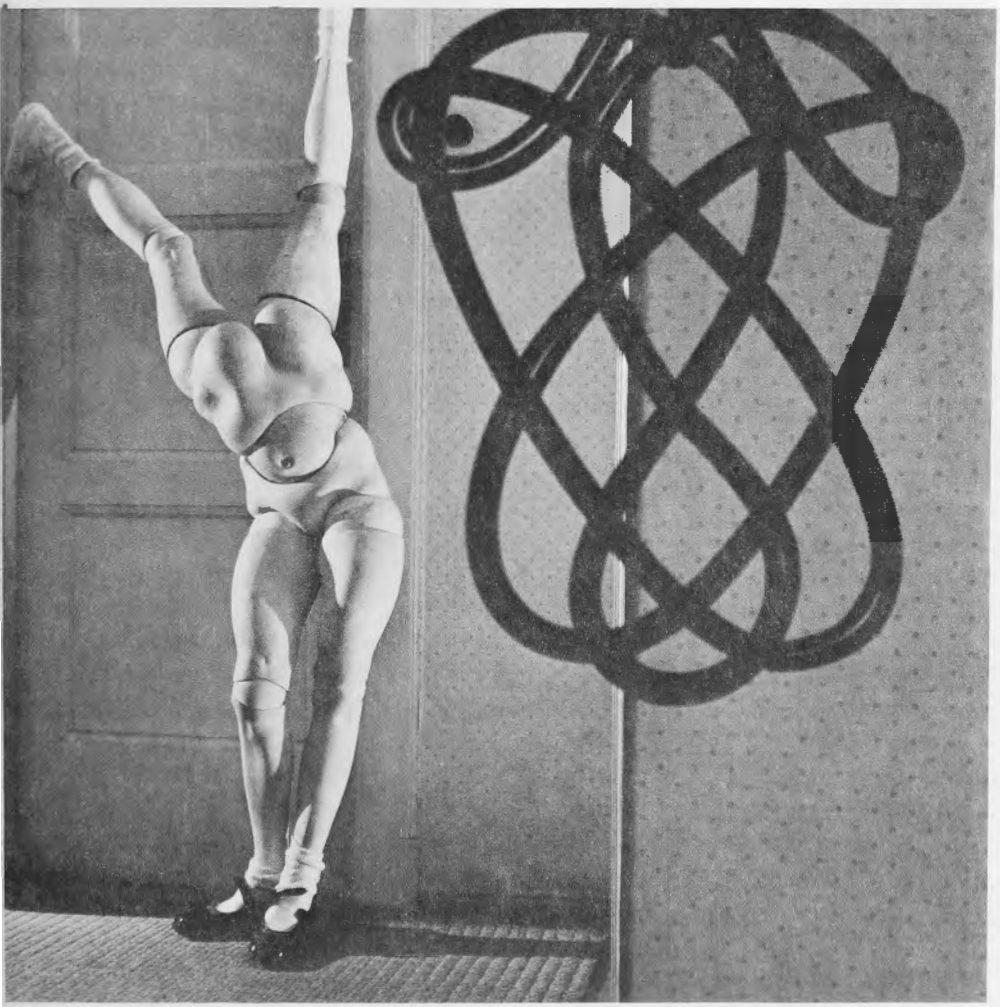
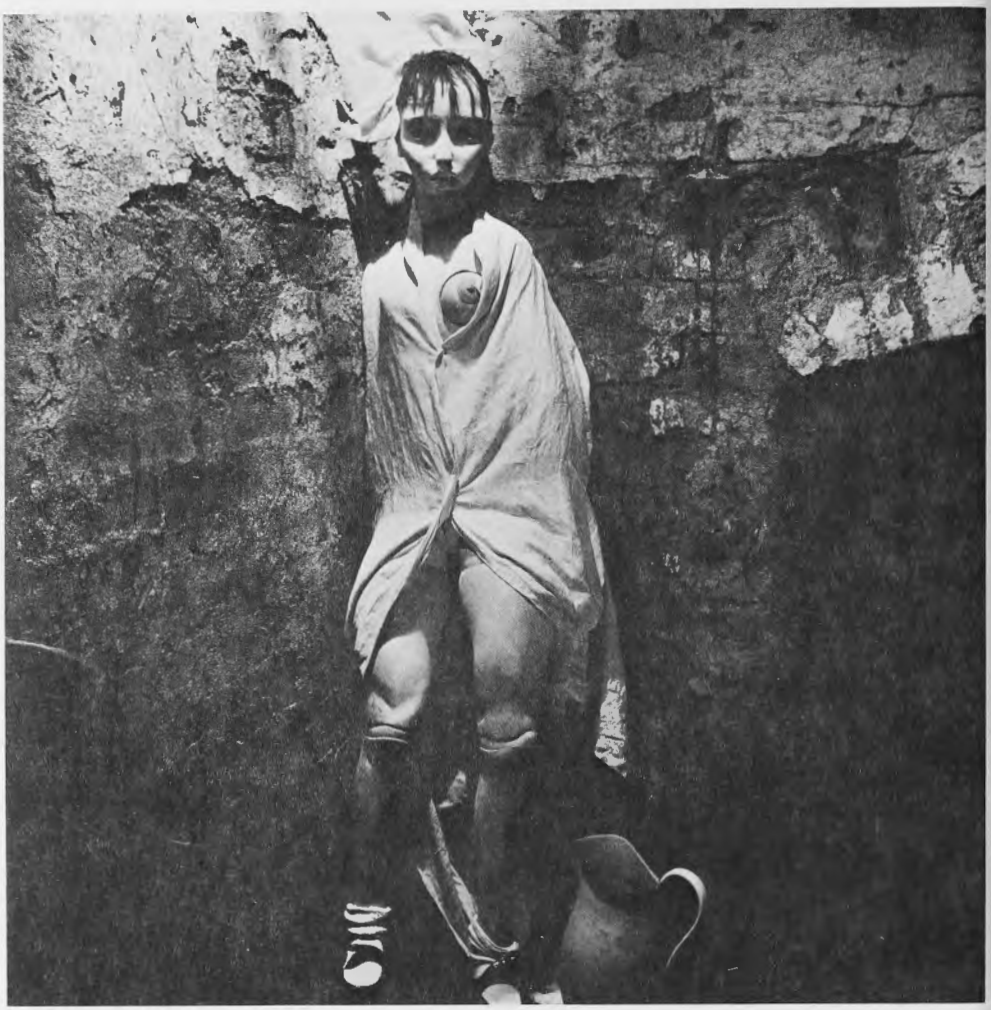


LA POUPEE



LA POUPEE

LES MILLES EN FEU / pencil on paper, 1940, 13" x 16-1/2", Coll. Herbert and Virginia Lust

QUATRE FEMMES / pencil on paper, 1940, 8" x 10-3/4", Coll. Herbert and Virginia Lust

CINQ FEMMES / pencil on paper, 1943, 5-1/4" x 8-1/4", Coll. Herbert and Virginia Lust

NOTES POUR LA NOUVELLE JUSTINE
(from *PETIT TRAITE DE MORALE*)

etching on Japanese paper in two colors, 1968, 10" x 12"
Coll. Clayton and Caryl Eshleman

HANS BELLMER

MEMORIES OF THE DOLL THEME

(Tr. from the German by Peter Chametzky, Susan Felleman, and Jochen Schindler)

Pulp writers, magicians, and confectioners used to have that secret something, that beautiful sweet which was called nonsense and that brings joy. They dispensed with that unhappiness normally associated in my experience with useful intentions, and revealed the mysteries of roads less travelled by.

As to utility, it can at least be said that its trace could still be found along these routes. As I started to rummage around, it would pop up again like the memory of the worst banalities in a phrase book, which nevertheless have a basic appeal. Strange images were painlessly divested of their actual instructional purpose. Their acuity alone remained. They desired unheard of clarification and granted just enough of themselves to become newly believable to the expectations that had been aroused. This degenerate clarity could certainly be seductive. It could be mimicked and gave the game a whole new aspect. Books were not able to satisfy my curiosity and ambition until one day I was totally taken over by the miracle of magic: the conjurer's arts.

The great magician was surrounded with such splendor and secret knowledge and mastered tricks. What a dazzling mixture of the jejune and mysterious was buried in his instructions and catalogues! And what forms!—It was worth all my obsessive efforts when, amid the smell of glue and wet plaster, the essence of all that is impressive would take shape and become a real object to

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Translator's Note: An English translation of a fragment of Robert Valençay's 1936 French rendering of Bellmer's original German has been published in Lucy Lippard, ed., *Surrealists on Art* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1970), pp. 63–66. Our new translation is from the original German in Hans Bellmer, *Die Puppe* (Karlsruhe: Th. Eckstein, 1934), pp. 5–13. The Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University contains a rare copy of this tiny volume that includes this text and a series of tipped-in black and white photographs of Bellmer's doll. The text has been reprinted in Hans Bellmer, *Die Puppe* (Frankfurt: Ullstein, 1976), pp. 9–12.

be possessed: the bogus *Brötchen* and the illusionistic mirror box were added to the bloodied thumb and the writing hand. Emil the Poltergeist arose, followed presently by the spheres of India, the mysterious bran jar, the cylinders and the rings, bones, tinctures, and the revoltingly large feet. So much excess required an echo. This surfeit was above all manifest among apprentices, tested in the mildly insidious form which was cultivated in the characteristic manner of American Indian medicine men. Not every day was marked by nervous sweat, and now and then the evil was remedied by a party and distribution of spoils. Spoils were anything colorful and dangerous that through some kind of analogy promised to arouse medicinal communal theft. Their possession meant available danger and desire; it was power over the imagined zone of their origin. The symbolism of this was not so far removed from the appreciation of the reproduction, made possible by the books of magic, but eventually also made accessible by the camera.

Its pictures made the gruesomeness of "everyday life" and the "fourth dimension" believable for all, and it was certainly a result only of their prosaic background if the pathos associated with the heroic and the horrible ebbed, and the intended shock was lost. Perhaps there was more authentic danger in the photography that was banned—why shouldn't one be able to produce it? But this new enthusiasm finally caused us some trouble, and it suffices to say, if I remember correctly, that it was in this way that my thoughts turned to the young maidens.

In fact, certain things in the realm of the maiden have always been desired. They might often be those fragile things, like black Easter-eggs decorated with doves and rings of pink sugar that, besides being tempting, luckily possessed no other advantage. They were hollow. Their appeal promised from the first only disappointment: it was self-satisfying and thus earned the questionable reputation of the truly useless. The decorations—white doves, roses, wringing hands—surely couldn't deny their origin in some maternal album of verse. But in fact, turning away from baroque confections, one saw that a single colored glass marble sufficed to stretch the imagination towards something clearly unsettling. The marble was less intimate, though it offered a view of its interior that allowed one to observe the frozen ecstasy of its spirals. It was riveting. Thoughts were enlivened by its tensions.

The sphere took on supernatural powers until it floated transparently through the room. Enticed by this miracle, the gathered-lace ribbon wrapped itself around the marble's curves, the lost leg of a little puppet bent over it, cigar box wood tilted at a menacing vertical, and its imprint faded up above, by the celluloid ball and the corkscrew curls that wound around it. In between, a breast pressed against a brittle fan and the silk sash stuck sharply into the sphere of the violet ring that encircled as if it were an aureole and an obstruction. The dream vanished, wiped away with the real rustle of paper, and like any other mist, like flies, it escaped through the heart of the outhouse door.[1]

The marble lingered in the fingers in disrepute, as if it held many giggling girls behind the scenes. There was simply no more point in regarding as inconsequential such girlish secrecy. What trickled down from the attic stairs, through the cracks in the door, from playing doctor—something like a raspberry schnapps enema—was not without appeal, even enviableness. People like me only admit with reluctance the realization that it is those things about which we know nothing that lodge themselves all too firmly in the memory. And like me, in view of just the legs of such little brats, no one would have remained without suspicion.

When they just stood there, one couldn't expect anything more from their bowed and especially knock-kneed legs than the stumbling about of young goats. Seen from the front or the back, the curves were less amusing, because the fragile calf, emboldened by the padding of the knees, dared an inquisitive curvature. But amazement was endless when they unexpectedly pulled themselves up and in impudent play tried out their suspension with runaway hoops, finally hanging naked from open embroidery and loose folds, in order to savor idly together the aftertaste of their game.

This was not to be compared with the lace-trimmed little tarts in the bakery. On the contrary, these girlish legs had a certain inviolability, from which my grand magician's ego rebounded like their balls. There were no spoils to be had here, and at best, perhaps, the unfamiliar sound of a name, caught in passing, might remain useable as the letter of the unspeakable. Since my language had become coarse in a brook of imagined firewater, any verbal attempt to capture such intricate things would have been

subject to the art of hoarsely gasped cursing, and choked in a wave of ridiculousness.

No doubt there was something uncanny about the maidens. With little effort, the casual quiver of their pink pleats, they transformed one into a thoroughly common youngster whose muddy pants and muddy shoes were grossly exaggerated in size when seen in the light of disenchanted self-contemplation. The bitter aftertaste did not even totally subside when one of these flexible dolls deigned to descend to the depths of our world and when, amid the labyrinth of the dark apartment—amidst draped chairs, boxes and ironing-board—a heart began to beat. Furtive contacts probably allowed the conjecture that the bestowal of their happiness was not without their own agency and that of others—aside from the result of chance, there remained the personal, too. But the memory of them left behind too many desires that gnawingly and persistently began to circumscribe a certain goal. To clear it up right away: this goal's popular monogram on clapboard fences and outhouse walls seemed too barren to me. Above all, it lacked the convincing and meritorious clarity of refined handicraft, and it had no claim to higher values, as did a pure spatial representation of a brass coil or of my Poltergeist. But probably it had been sterilized through collective use; it was made impotent by the gazes of too many passers-by, whose curiosity and humility were still irreconcilable. If the promise could not be fulfilled here, it seemed obvious to look more on the inside, as in the panoramas in my black boxes. But the young maidens were ultimately neither boxes nor alarm clocks, and therefore offered not the slightest pretext for transforming desire for their charm into destructive or creative activity.

I can be believed when I say that the gutter under my window will no longer become the Mississippi, that the junk in my old drawer and the stains on the wall-paper are only ironic memories of the excess of energies past. With my inactivity the vague fear set in that this pink region was forever beyond me.

Certainly, in later years I sometimes captured a bit of this fantasy in a drawing or while in play with an ecstatic woman. But how little remained. Only a trifle when measured against the contents of that miraculous garden whose distant odor had so promptly devalued my magic act. It might have been supposed

that this fabulous distance, just as with the dolls, could be a necessary component of any super-sweet thing, and deteriorates when it is no longer unattainable. Wasn't exactly that which the imagination seeks in desire and intensification to be found in the doll (in the image of precisely her dollishness), who only had life in so far as one projected it onto her, who despite her limitless submissiveness understood that she was reserved for despair? Didn't it spell the final triumph of the young maidens, with their large averted eyes, when their charms were captured rapaciously by the conscious gaze; when with aggressive fingers, grasping after form, slowly, part-by-part, that which the senses and the brain had distilled emerged?

Fit joint to joint, testing the ball-joints by turning them to their maximum position in a childish pose; gingerly follow the hollows, sampling the pleasures of curves, losing oneself in the clamshell of the ear, creating beauty and also distributing the salt of deformation a bit vengefully. Furthermore, don't stop short of the interior: lay bare suppressed girlish thoughts, so that the ground on which they stand is revealed, ideally through the navel, visible as a colorful panorama electrically illuminated deep in the stomach.

Should not that be the solution?

Notes

1 ***zog er durchs Herz der Aborttür ins Freie ab:*** refers to the heart-shaped opening often found on outhouse doors in Germany, equivalent to the American half-moon (hence the German slang term for a bathroom, ***die Herzkammer***, literally, "the heart chamber"). Bellmer again uses the connection between heart images and the toilet when he later dismisses the monogram carved by a young lover on a wooden fence or bathroom wall as having "no claim to higher values."

HERBERT LUST

FOR WOMEN ARE ENDLESS FORMS: HANS BELLMER'S DARK ART

"Any attempt to extend the subject matter of art is extremely distasteful to the public; and yet the vitality and progress of art depend in a large measure on the continual extension of the subject matter."

—Oscar Wilde: *The Soul of Man Under Socialism*

"When everything that man is not is added to man, then man becomes himself."

—Hans Bellmer

I. Hans Bellmer, The Man

Hans Bellmer, perhaps the freest "thinker" among twentieth century artists, was born in 1902 in Katowice (now southwestern Poland) although his parents were German. Nothing in his childhood indicated that he would become the most condemned artist since Van Gogh. The Bellmer family was prosperous middle-class. Although the father was a tyrant, the mother was a loving, sensitive presence for her children. According to Freud, such a background is ideal for a child, with the father instilling the ability for self-criticism (the superego) and the mother, all nurturing self-acceptance (the ego), two elements essential for the self-confidence needed to function well in life. In addition to having the father's conditional and the mother's unconditional love, Bellmer was also loved—if not worshipped—by his brother and sister. At any rate, Hans Bellmer began his mature life in the licentious

Weimar Republic with considerable self-confidence and a hatred for authority in any form. In 1922 he attended engineering college in Berlin, where he made friends with members in the Dada group, above all, George Grosz. Due to his scientific background Bellmer helped Grosz understand various technical problems in art, while the older artist encouraged in Bellmer his innate radicalism and fierce independence. Grosz and classical German art, above all that of Altdorfer and Baldung Grien, were the principal influences on Bellmer. A decade later Surrealism was to become another important influence.

In 1927 Bellmer married Margarete, a magical and gentle woman. It was a happy marriage, blessed by tenderness and a solid intellectual rapport. Bellmer remained in Berlin, earning a successful living as a designer and developing fast as an artist.

Then in 1932–1934, Bellmer's happiness was shattered when Germany turned to Hitler. Other personal problems compounded this disaster. His father became a Nazi. Far worse, Margarete's tubercular condition worsened and it was clear she would die. As bonded and close as they were before these events, they grew even closer, and Bellmer was to watch over and nurse her with great tenderness until her death in 1938. So in this 1932–1934 period, Bellmer realized the he was not just losing his beloved Weimar Republic, but also the human who meant the most to him. Overnight his happiness and peace were destroyed. Despite severe financial problems caused by his being a virulent anti-Nazi, Bellmer stayed on in Germany to care for Margarete; soon after her death he moved to Paris for good. There he was embraced by the Surrealists with whom he had already been showing his works for five years. He only returned to Germany for a few brief visits to his mother, whom he continued to help however he could for her entire life.

Contrary to what certain detractors have implied, all evidence points to the fact that Bellmer was an outstanding and moral human in every respect. Few lives can outshine his when it comes to honor, respect for fellow humans, and utter devotion to his friends and loved ones. Although, after 1932, his work's rejection, both in Germany and in France—by all the Surrealists except Eluard—was to shatter him, it did not shatter his innate kindness and decency. He remained a noble and free spirit until his death in 1975.

II. The First Doll, 1934:
Pioneering Optional Art and Conceptual Photography

Many artistic theories may be summarized in a few words, even though the thinking behind them is encyclopedic. Such is the case with Bellmer's revolutionary approach to the female figure and photography. For Bellmer, the human body is a fearful package, or wounded sentence, with many parts that can be added to, subtracted from, multiplied, divided, shifted and rearranged like an anagram. In effect, the body is a puzzle, meandering between chaos and order, with interchangeable parts.

In 1934, while living between Berlin and his parents' home, Bellmer decided to protest against the "new Germany" by committing an "action" that would be as useless as possible. He wrote, "I will construct an artificial girl with anatomical possibilities which will re-physiologize the dizziness in passion which invents all desires." His Doll was an intended insult to Hitler and Bellmer's Nazi father.

In its concept, nothing was more Surrealist than this Doll, meant to invent all desires. Bellmer's word "all" has been overlooked by commentators. It does not apply just to eroticism but to all emotions and anxieties encompassed in the need to be loved. Bellmer's Doll, born in anxious times, became an anxious object.

How could this doll invent all desires? Bellmer's revolutionary answer was to abandon the traditional immobility in sculpture and to create a statue with enough movable parts that it could be arranged and rearranged in myriad postures. As such, the Doll could become many different women or anagrams for a woman. The viewer could take this sculpture and turn it into many different poses, masks or fantasies. Metaphorically, the Doll would force the viewer to "transmigrate," by becoming involved in Her creation. Thus, Bellmer created the first major example for the movement that in the sixties became known as "optional art," an art form that allowed the viewer to participate in the actual visual effect caused by the art work.

Bellmer's first Doll was composed from several dozen parts linked together by hinges, joints and small balls. As such it could be constructed and deconstructed in many ways, ranging from passive to aggressive, from provocative to calming, from submissive to violent, from virginal to whorish. In this way, the Doll lib-

erated sculpture from its eternal convention, the frozen object, and, in a sense, melted history. She gave birth to optional art and achieved in Her birth a peak which has never been surpassed.

The Doll was also an important early stage in what has now become known as conceptual art, that is to say, an artistic process in which the concept, information, or philosophy is as important, or more important, than any resulting visual residue. Sol LeWitt, who is often credited with inventing contemporary conceptual art, has written, "the idea is the machine that makes the work." In the Doll's case, the concept was that "some useless act must be committed to defy the Nazis." This concept had three stages in producing a visual artifact: (1) Constructing a sculpture-creature that would be "useless"; (2) Committing another useless act by photographing the useless object; (3) Making a book from the useless objects deriving from the primary useless object, the Doll. The Doll thus became a face for Defiance.

So, in 1934, *Die Puppe,* the tiny book by Bellmer, emerged, with his magical, knotted text and ten photographs depicting the useless stages in making a useless object. As Peter Webb has written in *Hans Bellmer,* a remarkable book that is the primary starting point for Bellmer studies:

> The ten photographs are a record of successive stages in the progress of the Doll's construction. They are thus an early example of conceptual art insofar as the pictorial account of the making of the artifact eventually takes the place of that artifact itself. (p. 30)

It must be emphasized not only that this first Doll became a universal symbol due to Her ability to produce anxiety, but also that She belongs to that great tradition in classical art, the young female nude. Just as women, old and young, have been able to identify with the nudes in Titian, Goya, or Tom Wesselman, so might they identify with the Doll's ability to trigger male desire. The Doll may be at times passive and even dismembered, but She always seems stimulating to male desire, conscious or unconscious.

In addition to the ten photographs recording the Doll's construction and deconstruction, *Die Puppe* has a nine page text by Bellmer that summarizes Surrealist thought on human destiny with

explosive metaphors. This text, plus others that were to follow, should rank Bellmer's among the best Surrealist prose. Though I oversimplify the text, the main idea is: no greater life force exists than sexuality, because, in the negative and positive ways with which it shatters psyche, in the overwhelming creative forces it releases, we become more essence-aware than in any other way. That is why Bellmer claimed his Doll was a "solution." He summarizes his thought in these famous concluding passages from *Die Puppe:*

> . . .Wasn't exactly that which the imagination seeks in desire and intensification to be found in the doll (in the image of precisely her dollishness), who only had life in so far as one projected it onto her, who despite her limitless submissiveness understood that she was reserved for despair? Didn't it spell the final triumph of the young maidens, with their large averted eyes, when their charms were captured rapaciously by the conscious gaze; when with aggressive fingers, grasping after form, slowly, part-by-part, that which the senses and the brain had distilled emerged?
>
> Fit joint to joint, testing the ball-joints by turning them to their maximum position in a childish pose; gingerly follow the hollows, sampling the pleasures of curves, losing oneself in the clamshell of the ear, creating beauty and also distributing the salt of deformation a bit vengefully. Furthermore, don't stop short of the interior: lay bare suppressed girlish thoughts, so that the ground on which they stand is revealed, ideally through the navel, visible as a colorful panorama electrically illuminated deep in the stomach.
>
> Should not that be the solution?*

One may well ask, "solution" to what? It must be remembered that Surrealism was a romantic philosophy that maintained that the greatest human adventure was total love between a man and a woman. In order to realize this magical experience all taboos

*This is taken from the translation by Chametzky, Felleman and Schindler appearing in this issue of *Sulfur*.

needed to be destroyed. Now, few taboos are more intense than that against child molestation. So perhaps Bellmer reasoned that if he could make the human psyche consider sex with a child, it would be easier to destroy the taboos connected with adult sexuality, and, therefore, to prepare the way for the intense, no-holds-barred love dreamed by the Surrealists: a love based on *total* honesty. If Bellmer intended to use child carnality as a tool with which to break down the psyche and free it up for total honesty in romance and art, then it must be said that his success was, at best, partial. Maybe he misses because there is very little that is childlike about his Doll. In fact, the face, was well as the stocky, androgynous body, depending upon a viewer's experience and perspective, might well range in age from sixteen to thirty years old. So, I must conclude that, if Bellmer thought he was finding a "solution" because the images were shocking insofar as they involved young girls, as he wrote, he was exaggerating. For me, the images are shocking because they ignite the psyche in two areas: (1) adult and child anxiety memories and (2) the sado-masochistic energies that so often transform sexuality.

What is certain is that the Doll book is a remarkable artistic achievement. In the overall sense, the photographs are presented along musical lines. The image cycle opens on a powerful tone: Eros as a skeletal armature. It ends on a pianissimo: a rose floating on a lace hill forested with legs and embroideries, which represents the decomposition after the composition. Between the beginning and the ending photographs, the images relate to pastoral eroticism, nostalgia and wandering sensuality. In this book, Bellmer did not find the whole "solution," but succeeded insofar as the Doll, in Her androgynous anxiety, Her loitering eroticism, and Her electric stagnation does seem to induce both sexes to dream the unthinkable.

III. Bellmer's Drawing

Bellmer's draftsmanship is unique in Surrealism because it is grounded in northern European drawing. As for Surrealist influences, Dali was a help because he also was attached to classical drawing. Like Dali, Bellmer was not involved with automatism. However, he embraced certain technical innovations in Surrealism

like "decalcomania," and, along with Ernst, was a leading practitioner after its invention by Dominguez. Bellmer may have been the first Surrealist to draw on wrinkled paper, and he did several magnificent portraits in this medium, using the structural wrinkles in the paper to help composed the face. Bellmer may have been the leading portraitist among the Surrealists, if by this we mean traditional lifelike portraits; indeed, due to his dire poverty, at times he earned money by doing portraits.

Although Bellmer's drawing is not automatic, as is Masson's, it nevertheless has the vivid energy associated with automatic drawing. Bellmer's line is remarkable; it can go fast or slow, meander or spurt, zip or swirl. Certain drawings bristle with energy, others are languid, and sometimes, in a single drawing, an intense image in one part plays off against a static image in another part.

Bellmer's drawing has four main components:

1. The most exciting is the drawing that proceeds by coagulation. It utilizes lagging images and metaphors that at first seem to dawdle in the background; then, as they are being viewed, they drift into the foreground. Such drawings swarm with countless details, clothed in stains or fogs that meld everything together. The resulting intense tangle, a slow or fast whirlpool, often has a total visual impact that resembles hermetic cubism. These drawings, mostly in pencil, are foggy or fume-like in a way that renders space touchable and visible. Some "coagulation" drawing examples would be: "Les Milles en Feu" (figure 5) and "Quatre Personnages" (figure 6), both done while Bellmer was in prison camp in 1940 with Max Ernst.

2. Drawings divided into sections or vignettes in which various erotic activities are happening. These vignettes are laid out much like synthetic cubism with the various vignette-planes connected by lines or smudging, thereby using the vignette's clear planes to contrast with foggy, biomorphic space.

3. Sometimes, with success, Bellmer employs the first two methods in the same drawing.

4. Classical Surrealist drawing. Here, the image predominates with no particular effort at stylistic innovation, such as one often finds in Ernst or Magritte. In some spectacular 1934 drawings executed in white gouache on brown paper, the images themselves are so extraordinary that they need no stylistic cloth, lest such

adornment detract from the impact Bellmer intended on the onlooker's unconscious.

Though I may oversimplify, it might be said that in Bellmer's work, drawing leads toward sculpture and photography which, in their turn, cause the artist to rethink the drawing. There is in Bellmer a constant dialogue among all the plastic mediums. It is interesting that even Bellmer's most virulent detractors concede that his drawing is unusual and powerful as pure visual style.

IV. The New Doll's Games: The Body as Bodies Around a Circle

Bellmer's goal as a Surrealist was to shred then coalesce the endless though fearful imagination and lead it into unchartered territory. For such surgery, however, he needed diverse scalpels. He thought he had created these with the first Doll. After all, this first Doll could be arranged in almost countless positions—what more would an artist need to puncture the imagination? Much more, according to Bellmer, who soon found an *incredible* solution: a doll with more legs, legs that were slender and teasing. And, by implication, more vaginas. Therefore, by a huge leap, he ended any need for a naturalistic torso in sculpture. To terrify and calm the unconscious by strange erotic gestures, what image could be more jolting than a woman who, though not repulsive, could tantalize the nerves with many legs and many vaginas flowering from an amazed navel?

The artist found this exciting solution through studying Renaissance dolls in which the stomach is a ball joint to which could be attached multiple limbs.

In 1935 the first step toward this new sexual metaphysics came into being with the second Doll, sometimes called "the doll's center." It was a voluptuous female torso whose stomach was a large ball to which could be attached two torsos, one on top, the other on bottom. It was among the strangest and most menacing objects ever created by a Surrealist: the top genitalia seemed to invite sexuality from the sky while the bottom genitalia invited sex from the earth.

In early 1936, Bellmer believed that this second Doll, or Doll Center, had to be expanded to permit it to be divided and multi-

plied in a more provocative way. This thinking led to the third Doll, an erotic woman, machine, or galaxy, born from adding to the second Doll a female head, plus the capacity for six legs, two arms and three vaginas.

He gained impetus for the book *The Doll's Games* from photographing the second and third Dolls. Many scholars feel it is among the most beautiful books to come from the Surrealist school, which produced more handsome books than any art movement in history.

Renée Riese Hubert, in her definitive *Surrealism and the Book,* (University of California Press, 1988), writes:

> In *Les Jeux de la Poupée* we have not merely a remarkable illustrated book but by all odds the prime surrealist example of a collaboration where the quite separate ventures and development of the two partners mysteriously come together. The artist included fifteen specially colored photographs, a technical innovation which he supervised. Although he lacked the professional expertise of Man Ray, he did understand some of the creative potential of photography. He succeeded in changing proportions by a novel use of blow-up, a technique eminently suited to making concrete and exterior his peculiar vision of the unconscious workings of the mind. (p. 139)

Color film was seldom used by professionals in 1939. For example, Man Ray and the other Surrealist photographers worked only in black and white. Among the reasons they gave for this was that color film was too unstable. Bellmer solved this problem by using aniline dyes on black and white photographs: the dyes were more stable than color film, and, far more important and exciting, they were much more faithful to the artist's color vision.

The sixteen photographs for *The Doll's Games* mark an important stage in modern color photography and modern art because, for the first time, hand-coloring, used in the 19th century by photographers, was used by a plastic artist for his own special effects. Nowadays plastic artists, as differentiated from photographers, are coloring photographs galore, but as far as I can ascertain, Bellmer was the first plastic artist to use it as a principal medium. The

Bellmer photographs are similar to small paintings or miniatures. Their gorgeous colors heighten the image as they range from the pastoral to the stormy, from the sunny-serene to a sizzling rainbow.

The photographs, as illustrations for fourteen poems by Paul Eluard, progress, as in the first Doll book, along musical lines; in this case, like the structure to a 19th century symphony. Among the sixteen photographs, eight show a conventional human form with a head, but the other eight present an unusual doll with the head replaced by extra legs. Bellmer well realized that the four-legged, two-vagina dolls would have greater hallucinatory impact, so he reserved this special image power for the cycle's ending. Soaring like Beethoven's Ninth Symphony climax, the last four photographs, with their headless, four-legged, two-vagina female bodies, boom savagely, and exalt the psyche.

V. The Doll's Games and Death Metaphysics

In Eluard's poems, eroticism is present by its absence. These poems reflect a silent, hidden sensibility about fear, anxiety (both childhood and adult), and death. Eluard interprets the second Doll images as relating to normal human anxiety dramas rather than to eroticism. The Doll becomes courageous in Her will to resist the riddling anxiety aroused by human fragility, insecurity, eroticism and death. All this takes on a heightened sensitivity when one considers that the 1939 photographic cycle was born from his wife Margarete's slow death and Bellmer's being expelled from his home. I would further suggest that, like Bellmer himself, the Doll could be seen as a Nietzschean "yes" to life, insofar as that, though She is fragile, She also seems resolved to resist, and that She has, to use a Paul Tillich phrase, "the courage to be."

However, it is best to illuminate these thoughts by turning to the poems and the photographs they illustrate. A celebrated image, poem 7, shows an eerie forest setting. In the foreground, leaning against a black tree trunk, the Doll stands stretched with two legs straight up in the air, the other legs planted on the ground, with Her clothes at Her feet. The voluptuous female body, as so often in Bellmer, is identified as a girl by her child's anklets and patent-leather shoes. Hiding behind a tree in the

background looms a dark male figure. Many erotic interpretations have been given: a drama from the hidden desires in adult and child sexuality, impending rape, etc. Instead, Eluard sees this photograph as a universal anxiety symbol that, though including sex, transcends it:

"The thick beetle overtakes noon. Flame round and hard surround a gutter day like forsaken trades around misery. Man, watchful, forgets the day, lowers his brow, and loses. A shadow between drawn curtains, the earth overwhelms hills, fills in the valleys, joins bridges."

The key is given by the words "and loses." We humans are "forsaken trades of misery." Such pessimistic phrases dominate the other poems. For example:

Poem 4, "This world, without love, widower of the sun, what is it to us?"

Poem 11, "Winter at 5 A.M., she got up and, barely dressed, went to collect dead wood. She could have died from the pity she felt for herself."

Such a poem might relate to Bellmer's anguish over his wife's slow death. But the self-pity presented in it is masculine as well as feminine, childlike as well as adult. We are all tired. We are all beleaguered. And in our deepest unconscious, we know this. We all can identify with the Doll. The Doll, from one perspective, is an alienation symbol. From another, an existentialist symbol, showing courage before the brutality in destiny. She may be decomposed into scattered neutral parts, and even humiliated, but in Her there is a noble, passive resistance that all humans can relate to.

The Doll often appears as a homeless human, with no clothes except rags. No wonder that Eluard was able to see suspicion, alienation and fear in Her eyes, where others might just see sexual cunning. We all see what we want to see.

Poem 9 relates to perhaps the best anxiety photograph in Surrealism. The Doll is crouched at a stairway's bottom step. A rope is tied around one knee, and the other leg has vanished. A ribbon adorns Her hair. Her expression is stunned, sad, tender, resigned. The image is bathed in an eerie purplish light. Through Her, Bellmer has created the quintessential Surrealist "anxious object."

The poem reads:

"In the house with warped floors, with sagging roof, on the stairway with steps carpeted with old slippers, she is dense, opaque and uncouth. In a word, she is alone. Alone in her cold and muddy frame, alone and without eyes, implacably alone. It's elsewhere that pure air falls straight down on the appearances of community life."

Poem 10 refers to another "anxiety object": the Doll, without her head, having just one leg and arched into a comforter. As a hair or head substitute, three small balls with holes lie above and on her breasts. The torso has been distorted so that underneath the navel are buttocks rather than pubic hair. The poem reads:

"Blood and dust, a thimble of milk, a thimble of pure water, ten hand needles, oxidized, in the pillow's bilge. A thimble or straw in the barn, a thimble of gum in the well, a thimble of nothing here. The inside of the sheets for a mirror. A thimble of tigers with claws and heavy ink flowers at its lips, a nothing of earth."

Poem 13 brings the implicit eroticism in the photograph to an explicit pitch. The Doll is standing erect with a pair of legs substituted for her head. Again there is a looming male presence, this time symbolized by a gigantic carpet beater, in the foreground and through which the Doll is seen, that seems to cut through Her uppermost knees. Again there is an eerie purplish light accented with yellow and black. The poem is unique in the cycle as it is not a *double entendre*. It tells how male flesh yearns for the young.

"It's a girl!—Where are her eyes?—It's a girl!—Where are her breasts? It's a girl!—What is she saying?—It's a girl!—What is she playing with?—It's a girl, it's my desire!"

This poem-photography cycle was a true collaboration, because Eluard's gentler, sunnier nature reined in Bellmer's violent despair, making the resulting work more balanced and universal. Eluard persuaded Bellmer to omit the most despairing photographs from the book. Among these were several remarkable nightmare ones, as fine as anything in Bellmer's work. These are reproduced on pages 30–31 in Alain Sayag's catalogue for the Bellmer photography retrospective at the *Centre Pompidou*. In one the Doll is dressed in such finery as lace sleeves. Near Her stunned face is an unsheathed dagger. A beautiful hand, rare in Bellmer's doll imagery, is held before Her face, covering Her left eye as if to ward off a blow. Another photograph, on page 31, is

the most terrifying image in Bellmer: the Doll as monster in the ruins, or living corpse in a tomb garish with gaslight, and swallowing shadows. This prefigures many contemporary "theatre" photographs by such artists as Joel-Peter Witkin. The Doll has normal limbs, firm, round breasts, and is seated in what seems to be a basement coal bin filled with cobwebs and dust. Her clothes have been torn from Her and lie around Her hips and on the floor. Her body language is most provocative. Her legs are spread apart, Her hairless vagina thrusts forth. It could be an invitation to necrophilia—Her eyes are dead. And She is dead.

VI. The Later "Body" Photographs (1946–1958) and Bellmer's Quiet Influence

Bellmer all but ceased photography after his wife's death in 1938. Then, in 1946, he fell in love with a remarkable woman, the Rumanian Jewish poet, Nora Mitrani. At this time he took some magical, hallucinatory "mug shots," photographing her vagina, and also some lesbian "69" photographs. In this series, a naked woman perches on a motorcycle, her large vagina opening as if to devour. The way Bellmer combined the machine with the feminine genitalia prefigured some contemporary photography.

On a philosophical level, these later photographs should correct the simplistic sado-masochistic interpretations made about the first, second, and third Dolls. I have argued that, yes, the Doll is a woman, but above all a human who, homeless and alone, surpasses femininity in order to symbolize all that is human in the ability to resist daily brutality and fear. The later photographs confirm this view, because in them the woman never emerges as a victim, but as a reigning power, somewhat like the women in Paul Delvaux. The vaginas in the 1946 photographs are, if anything, brazen, defiant, self-contained, and self-confident. While it could be said that the woman here is an object, I would disagree. The vaginas in these photographs are proud to display their power and challenge the male to match it.

In 1958 Bellmer continued his body photography by depicting his lover bound in various positions, the most common one being with a cord drawn tightly around her plump body and turning it into a breasts-with-fatty-flesh landscape.

These photographs continued the philosophy expressed by the Doll. They show that, whether artificial or real, the female body contains within and around it endless forms. They make clear that Bellmer's work falls into two distinct phases: the early-the Dolls, 1934-1939, and the late-body theatres, 1946-1958.

Bellmer's influence on Surrealism was there from the start. As Peter Webb perceptively observes (Ibid., p. 46):

> No sooner had Bellmer's Doll made her scandalous debut, than female dummies were to be seen everywhere in surrealist exhibitions. Dali put one aboard his 'Rainy Taxi,' with live snails crawling over the elegant passenger's plaster thighs. Dominguez placed another in a satin-upholstered wheelbarrow. The 1938 International Surrealist Exhibition in Paris featured a 'Surrealist Street' down the pavement of which waited a whole row of the creatures fitted out with fantastic costumes and attributes. . .for a while it seemed as if all the Surrealists had succumbed to the doll-making craze: Ernst, Miro, Man Ray, Duchamp, Masson, Dominguez, Marcel Jean, Leo Malet and more besides.

Though these specific instances show Bellmer's visual influence, it is rather his philosophy that has so shaken contemporary art. Bellmer is not so much an artist as a state of mind. His liberating thought and life have touched many artists; for example, such painters as Matta, Wunderlich, Salle, Patricia Nix, Oldenburg and Rauschenberg in their erotic work, and such photographers as Maplethorpe, Witkin and Clarence Laughlin (whose most treasured book was the "Doll's Games"). Any artist interested in the female body's endless possibilities or "forbidden" mental states must reckon with Bellmer. Thanks to him, what was once unthinkable has almost become conventional. Countless young artists now work in the directions which, when Bellmer worked in them, led him to be shunned by other artists and ignored by collectors. This writing is nothing more than a start toward opening a dialogue about the "complete" Bellmer, who was among the most liberating and gentle minds of this century.

CLAYTON ESHLEMAN

LETTER TO HERBERT LUST WITH A RESPONSE BY HERBERT LUST

dear Herbert,

I awoke this morning with the following thought dominating my mind: that the 1958 photographs of the woman tied up in string by Bellmer were a grim parody of his earlier drawings—that the string becomes a caricature of his swirling line so seemingly free to investigate its own bee flight earlier—that the literal, actual body surfaces in late Bellmer, a rude mountain rising through the earlier mists of fantasy. Does this mean that ultimately Bellmer cannot sustain his desire to keep his investigations in the realm of imagination? Someone will say: the tied-up woman photographs represent another dimension of his art, that they anticipate X or Y to come, etc. For me, there is another message here: while they are not really bondage (she's in string, not chains—she's posed), they imply that the earlier drawings of feminine anatomy superimposed, sexually, upon itself, figure upon figure superimposed upon more figures is a kind of tying up—the lines less free than I had thought before—the line as Bellmer's mental rope or cable.

The human face is the focus of personality, and the fact that the tied-up woman is headless or faceless (meaning, the photo is cropped so that only the body or a bit of the head shows) relates these works to the doll constructions, most of which are headless also (the one with a head with a yellow tousled wig, no shoulders, her one visible eye utterly blank always has seemed like a death vision of Marilyn Monroe to me). I think that we have to say that on one level at least Bellmer has turned woman into an object in these constructions, has depersonalized her, turned her into an erotic machine, made her into a figure void of everything but genitally-magnetized body parts. In doing so, in dumping this object on a bed, erecting it against a wall, or posing it in a woods

(with male shadow lurking nearby), the implications while perhaps as broad as Eluard evokes in his prose poems are also quite narrow: she is an object to be manipulated, a body whose parts are interchangeable, and Bellmer is conceiving "her" in the 1930s when Nazi Germany is in the process of removing citizenship from Jews, homosexuals, Gypsies, etc., turning them into non-people, and I must say that these sprawled leggy Bellmer things, these octopodal leg constructions, decorated, as it were, with rosy pustules, remind me too much of Nazi killing center trenches packed with stick-like skeletons for me to view them (the Bellmer constructions) as simply "useless," or a protest against Nazism. On the other hand, I do not think that Bellmer was a Nazi, or that he was consciously participating in a fascistic vision. I think that there is an accidental parallel at work here, that Bellmer was involved in a force that was in the air, part of a European atmosphere: sadism and depersonalization. Had Bellmer photographed one of his "dolls" in a trench, or with barbed-wire in the background, we could then feel that he was consciously aware of the political implications of all depersonalization. But his work as I see it is adamantly ahistorical—the context in which we see his constructions (an apartment, a stairway, the woods, legs erect across the crotch of a tree) do not smell of their times, and as such they cannot be "read" as a direct, conscious commentary on the times—we are viewing, in effect, Bellmer's mind, washed of uniformed men, guns and clubs, tanks, barbed-wire, trains on their way to Dachau—Bellmer's mental performance on the body of woman as if this performance had no social consequences (of rape, brutality, chopped-up bodies, gased corpses) but was sheerly "surreal" or "aesthetic." And it is—to some extent. It is inventive and compelling, but in a way so ambivalent I hear gears screeching when I view it, a revelation of Germanic male mind of the 1930s, a mind obsessed with turning female anatomy into a sculptural kaleidoscope. Nothing is ultimately ahistorical—everything takes place in time, and time itself occurs in and through material, matter, us. If an artist like Bellmer drops out the social circumstances surrounding his activity, am I entitled to restore these circumstances when I view his work? I think I am to a certain extent, as long as I do not view the artist's work as merely a translation, or cloning, of political reality. The word "revelation"

above is significant, as Bellmer could have given us much less—he could have offered us a much more decorative, abstract, comfortable art that for me at least would not burn its way back into its times as I view it today. For centuries the male mind has cooked feminine anatomy in its cannibal pot, spicing this "dish" with love, Eros, and all the perfumes of the veils necessary to make such a mind feel that it is not without dignity. There will continue to be a tendency through this century's end, I fear, to either pounce on an artist like Bellmer and reject his work—or to isolate it from its social implications. I think it should be clear from what I am saying here that we must honor the inventiveness and, yes, courage, of a Bellmer, but at the same time we should view it through and across the spectrum of all that it evokes relative to the times in which its creation was made possible.

16 January 1990

Jan. 20, 1990

Dear Clayton,

Your letter is a brilliant analysis for certain problems relating to Bellmer. Some critics think just this, in particular some recent feminists. However there is not even one point in your letter that has any validity if it is viewed in an art historical or biographical context.

If you wish to attack Surrealism, that is one thing. But your complaints about Bellmer all relate to the Surrealism which 100% moulded him. Surrealist artists 100% did not reflect Nazi horrors in their art. As political as Surrealism was in words it never was in its art.

All the Nazi horrors you talk about were little more than suspected until 1936 at the *very earliest*. By that time Bellmer had completed almost all the works for which he is famous. About all that was known at that point was that Jews were being deprived

of civil rights and that there were a few detention camps—but Catholics and Protestants were also in these camps. Almost no killings had taken place.

Bellmer in no way revealed the German male mind of the 1930s. In fact all his deeds, art works and statements prove the contrary. Bellmer's main influence was Surrealism, above all Dali, a Spaniard (also, a little by his friend George Grosz, a Dadaist). Bellmer's political leanings were always to the left. He left Germany as soon as he could—he just stayed as long as he did because his beloved wife was dying.

Surrealism was a romantic philosophy which placed woman on a pedestal and considered woman in every way equal to man. They didn't always practice this, but at least they preached it. There was no male, Surrealist or otherwise, who was more honest, tender and respectful toward his female lovers than Bellmer.

All this should become clear to you if you just consider the art historical dates. Hitler came to power in 1933. Many intellectuals, including Heidegger, were fooled by him. Bellmer was never fooled. It took Heidegger until 1935 or so to wake up. However in 1933 when Hitler was still just in his talking stage, Bellmer conceived a violent hatred for him and started constructing his doll. This doll and its book and many spectacular drawings surrounding it were completed in 1934, when Hitler was still in his talking stage. The Doll doesn't represent what you claim at all. It is nothing more or less than a brilliant extension for what had been going on in Surrealism for fifteen years. Therefore to condemn Bellmer for his ideas is just to condemn Surrealism, as many have, and there's nothing wrong in that, but you should be clear about what you are doing.

Now, to specifics. The 1958 photos are not a grim parody of his earlier drawings. They have nothing to do with his drawings. For they are addressed to the needs for a specific medium, photography. Also, in doing them Bellmer became a brilliant pioneer of what is today known as body art.

Your second paragraph amazes me. You are a great poet, and like many great poets do not realize that the plastic arts have 100% different needs than poetry has. The human head is a prime tool of "psychological" expressionism—for example, in Van Gogh, the German expressionists and Giacometti. Bellmer rejected psychological expressionism as an artist and was trying to do something

very different. Are you criticizing him for this? He was founding, and extending, Surrealist "erotic" expressionism. It was therefore necessary that as an artist he reject the prime subject matter used by psychologists and philosophers.

Say that you do not understand, or do not like, erotic expressionism, but do not say that an artist has not the right to do something new.

Bellmer left the face aside. He constructed and deconstructed the female body in order to make Eros dream. Making Eros dream was perhaps the most important Surrealist subject, according to Rubin and most scholars on the subject. Nothing is more absurd than to think that Bellmer in any way was thinking about dismemberment. Constructing and deconstructing the human body was done in marvelous ways by Masson, Dali, Ernst, and above all Miro—long before Bellmer, and he drew upon them in an innovative way, that *all* the Surrealists respected in the thirties. Know that you, an American in 1990, disagree with the Surrealists. But at the time and even today, few art lovers agree with you and the feminists. Even many feminists just see in Bellmer a dreamer, not at all a man turning a woman into an object.

"Adamantly ahistorical"???? How could Bellmer react to the horrors you cite, since he didn't know about them? His direction as an artist was set long before the world knew about these horrors—is there some rule that says that an artist should respond to political events? If there is, let's throw out Cubism done during World War I, throw out Mondrian and hundreds of other great artists. Throw out Klee, Kandinsky, de Chirico, Max Ernst, Léger, Juan Gris, etc. Also let's throw out Surrealist art.

It is amusing that you find Bellmer ahistorical, when art lovers find him quite historical—he was produced by French Surrealism.

Why don't you throw out Pound and Eliot while you're are at it? They contributed to Jews dying. And they were far worse to their women than Bellmer ever was.

You may be better able to understand your issues if you think about an artist you admire, such as Matta. Matta, at least in a psychological sense, was much influenced by Bellmer. Matta knew about the Nazi horrors. Yet there is no trace of this in his greatest work, which continues Bellmer's drive to make Eros dream and get free. Matta had communist leanings, yet this doesn't show in

his work. Matta in many ways just parodied Bellmer's erotic expressionism. Where Bellmer dared to be explicit, Matta often fudged and retreated into abstract eroticism—but I shouldn't say fudged, he was just interested in pure painting more than Bellmer was. There are quite a few Matta pornographic drawings—if you look at what women become in them you'd think Bellmer was a raging feminist—actually he was in his life. However what Matta did in drawing he didn't do in painting, where he remained in his greatest period, the forties, rather abstract. In short, art has different needs than poetry or the novel, and few artists have put their political obsessions into their actual art.

In fact, my dear Clayton, as much as your poetry enchants me, your entire letter is that of a poet, and a poet who is involved with the "psychological," "political" and "philosophical" side to art, but not much involved with the retinal or visual. It is very easy for a poet to react to changing politics—they can write a poem about it. It is very difficult for a plastic artist to do the same, unless he's a genius like Picasso—and in fact there's not as much political awareness in Picasso as is claimed. In fact 90% of the great plastic artists in this century showed almost no political feeling *in their art.* If you put down Bellmer, put down this other 90% also, and say that you are just interested in art insofar as it resembles poetry. Bellmer, like most artists, reserved his political feelings for his life, not his art—he was a rabid anti-Nazi, he left Germany and became a French citizen, and he was wonderful to his women. Now I ask you—what else should he have done?

Herbert Lust

THERESE LICHTENSTEIN

HANS BELLMER'S DOLLS: IMAGES OF PLEASURE, PAIN AND PERVERSION

Whose pleasure? Whose pain? What kind of pleasure? What kind of pain? How can we begin to discuss issues of spectatorial pleasure and pain when addressing artistic representation? To give you an idea of how complicated these questions can be, think for a moment about some of the contradictory functions of pleasure. It may be apprehended as a source of conservative tendencies, reifying status quo ideology, psychic stagnancy and repression, reproducing familiar and comfortable forms of oppression. Feelings of pleasure may also be connected to more progressive, liberating circumstances, perhaps in the strange and anticipatory exhilaration produced by entering a psychic void, or new and changing social, physical or political situations. These two theoretical possibilities may operate either separately or dialectically. Since theories and experiences of pleasure, pain and perversion are historically and culturally conditioned, I want to take as my starting point a specific set of complex and disturbing images and locate them in their "original" context, while remaining aware that the way I attempt to reconstruct these beginnings will reveal much about my own hermeneutical context.

The year is 1933. We are in Germany. The Weimar Republic has collapsed, and Hitler and the Nazis have risen to power. In a small apartment in Berlin Hans Bellmer, a modernist artist with leftist leanings, lives in semi-reclusion. Ardently anti-Nazi, he refuses to produce any work that would support the functioning of the Nazi state. He has abandoned his advertising practice and is at work, with assistance from his brother and with financial aid from his mother, on the construction of his first doll.

As a modernist artist living in Germany during the 1930s, Bellmer had to hide his work from the government. Beginning in 1933, the National Socialists confiscated modern art from galleries

and museums and forbade modern artists to paint. Bellmer's work, however, found an appreciative and supportive audience in the Surrealists, who saw Bellmer as a kindred spirit. They published his photographs of the doll in a double-page spread in the December 1934 issue of the Surrealist periodical *Minotaure*.

One of the series of 18 black-and-white photographs of the doll which appeared in *Minotaure* is a close-up of a partially disembodied, semi-nude adolescent girl/doll leaning her mask-like head against a wall. A long black wig is attached to her head, and her pale-white face bears a complex expression of demure coyness and abused martyrdom. The corpse-like victim, resembling a figure from Japanese Noh Theatre, beckons the viewer to look at her haunting, disintegrating body. Her slip is raised slightly above her buttocks, revealing a Pompeiian-like ruin. Bellmer's first doll was constructed out of a wooden frame, flax-fibre covered with plaster of paris, wooden ball joints, nuts, bolts, and metal parts. Bellmer photographed his doll in various locations, mostly in domestic interiors or in nature, often creating erotic scenarios: they could be found on staircases, on unmade beds, in an attic or a kitchen, leaning against a tree striking a seductive fashion-magazine-like pose, in a crucified position, or as victims of sexual attacks and abuse. Bellmer also frequently arranged her fragmented body parts like a still-life on Victorian lace that simulated the scene of a crime. Even today these images become devastating attacks on feminine fashion and domestic stereotypes, as well as on organized religion, while evoking a mournful nostalgia for an almost forgotten past. They produce a disquieting and tragic atmosphere of suffering and deprivation that should be examined within the historical and ideological context of Nazi Germany and its representation of women, for it is not a coincidence that the birth of the doll and the rise of Nazism occurred in the same year—1933. Personal and cultural loss and deprivation are suggested by these images of mourning.

Bellmer's doll, in part, is a symbolic attack on Nazi ideology and its mythic formation of a racist Aryan identity. Bellmer later claimed, "If the origin of my work is scandalous, it is because, for me, the world is a scandal."[1] By 1933 Nazi art policy had not yet been consolidated, but idealized images of women and men modeled on many traditions including Classical and Hellenistic

Greek as well as Medieval and Renaissance art proliferated in the mass media and the fine arts. Images of glorified youth and family helped produce codes of femininity and masculinity and the formation of Nazi identity. Women were portrayed as idealized virgins found in nature or cloistered interiors, emblems of sexual purity and perfection, young nurturing mothers, or Venus-like goddesses based on models from ancient myths that have been transformed. Professor Adolf Ziegler, President of the Reich Chamber of Visual Arts and known by his enemies as the "master of the pubic hair," painted an allegory, *Four Elements,* which hung in a living room of the Munich Führer house. This painting typifies Nazi art—a debased classicism, bordering on illustration, of four awkwardly rendered nude women.

It could be argued that the doll photographs are emblems of the return of the repressed, of the diverse groups of oppressed people in Nazi Germany (including Bellmer, himself) who were silenced and brutalized by the Nazis—Jews, Modern artists, the insane, socialists, gays, and lesbians, who constituted the others against which Nazi norms were established. In *Myth of the Twentieth Century,* written in 1930, Alfred Rosenberg, one of the leading Nazi ideologues, integrates art and racial theory. He writes, "The night coffee houses of the asphalt city became the artists' studios. Theoretical, bastardized dialectics became the prayer wheel whose whining accompanied ever new-isms.. The racial chaos of Germans, Jews, unnatural mongrel breeds of the street became prevalent. The consequence was the rule of the Mestizo. The Mestizo claimed to represent his 'soul expression' in bastard stillbirths, caused by the spiritual syphilis and painterly infantilism."[2]

Modern artists were turned into negative images of polluted, primitive Others, and modernism was condemned and appropriated by the National Socialists to justify their own art and ideology. The acts of colonizing, possessing and systematically destroying the Other began with the strategic construction of the category of degenerate otherness. By creating a comparative discourse between the acceptable, "normal" Nazi and the unacceptable, "degenerate" Other, the Nazis could better substantiate, legitimize and communicate their pseudo-scientific eugenics-based race theory and the myth of their own identity.

Bellmer inverts Nazi representations—especially the fetishization of the youth cult—of healthy, fertile adolescence by constructing a complex alternative vision of female adolescence. Although Bellmer's photographs rupture the Nazi paradigm of feminine identity, what *kind* of alternative does he provide? How can I speak about Bellmer's images of an oppressed, vulnerable, victimized, sado-masochistically eroticized female doll, and in terms of both male and female spectatorship? Since spectatorial responses to cultural objects are deeply mediated by institutional and ideological spaces of viewing, I once again ask the question, who are these real and imagined spectators from the past and present, and in what contexts do they exist? Leaving the question of specific spectatorship aside for a moment, I must turn to another question and troubling paradox: how do we speak about Bellmer's dolls which turn against "naturalized" Nazi images of Aryan femininity while at the same time they set up a sado-masochistic dynamic, a dynamic that the Nazis actively used in establishing their power and myths?

The photographs of the doll portray psychic and emotional dimensions of the sado-masochistic dynamic. They are uncompliant and alienated victims who display, and at times flaunt, their bruised femininity in various entrapped situations. Because of the artificial, highly theatrical lighting (reminiscent of 1920s German expressionist films and turn-of-the-century color-tinted pornographic postcards) and the doll's macabre series of bodily fragmented permutations, the viewer would never mistake this doll as a mimetic representation. Although her actual body parts are clearly mimetic, Bellmer's various arrangements of them in what he calls anagrams of the body distorts and reconfigures the structural order of the surface of the body. Thus, the body of the doll is analogous to a linguistic construction, revealing what Bellmer calls the "physical unconscious." (Investigating Bellmer's concept of the physical unconscious is crucial for understanding his doll, but will be impossible to do within the parameters of this article.) These images produce a sense of uncanniness: the doll appears not quite dead or alive, real or mechanical/artificial. Some of the images suggest the doll's pleasure in suffering—the kind of sexual pleasure resulting from humiliation and debasement associated with masochistic martyrdom. For example, consider his second

doll, made in 1935. This doll was more flexible than the first one. It consisted of a combination of tissue paper and glue which was painted over to appear life-like. Its body parts revolved around the stomach, the central ball joint. Bellmer constructed two pairs of legs and two pelvises, each one reversible and functioning as either breasts and shoulders or thighs and buttocks.

Many of Bellmer's photographs suggest an s/m scenario in which the artist assumes the sadist's role. Freud reminds us that sadism is a kind of masquerade, because the sadist's hidden identification with the masochistic position enables him to identify with the victim and receive pleasure from both positions. If one's identity is never completely separate from the subject's relation to another subject or object in the world, this relation helps to create the subject's imaginary concept of himself. According to Freud, "A person who feels pleasure in producing pain in someone else in a sexual relationship is also capable of enjoying as pleasure any pain which he may himself derive from sexual relations. A sadist is always at the same time a masochist, although the active or the passive aspect of the perversion may be the more strongly developed in him and may represent his predominant sexual activity."[3] An empathetic relationship may exist at times between the masochist and the sadist, who are symbiotically united. Freud distinguished between two types of sadism, one based on one's domination over another and the other predicated on causing pain in the other. At the same time that this desire to dominate reveals a desire for independence and recognition, it denies one's dependency on others. Jessica Benjamin claims that "true independence means sustaining the essential tension of those contradictory impulses; that is, both asserting the self and recognizing the other. Domination is the consequence of refusing this condition."[4] Masochism is also a search for recognition, but recognition from the one who dominates.

In *Masochism and Modern Man,* Theodor Reik explains what he considers the significance of three major components of masochism: fantasy, the suspense factor, and the demonstrative factor. He distinguishes this last factor from exhibitionism: "The showing or wanting to-be-seen is actually a means to invite the sexually gratifying punishment. . . .The place of psychical discomfort or pain is frequently taken by a humiliating or degrading display of

psychical or mental deficiencies, which in the fantasy have an exciting effect."[5] On the suspense factor Reik explains: "Being hung, or suspended from some contraption happens to be among the favorite masochistic practices. Presumably it gives a functional objectivity to the sensation of suspense."[6] Reik claims that masochism is not only characterized by the pleasure in discomfort, but also by the pleasure in the expectation of discomfort.

Many of Bellmer's images appear as visual and psychic analogues to these descriptions. How do sado-masochistic fantasies function in the doll photographs? In one photograph Bellmer's overhead camera angle places the viewer in a typically masculine position of voyeuristic surveillance and domination. The image suggests either an auto-erotic hermaphrodite or a couple trying to merge or copulate. The doubled body parts are joined at the waist, like symbiotic identical twins. The body(s) stretches across an unmade bed, with the half closest to the viewer dressed in pants with an open belt while the naked upper half lies inert. Remnants of a meal placed on a table next to the bed increase the mood of sexual foreplay and ravagement. The atmosphere is one of orgiastic impotence, one of frustrated desire. This image represents a visual ambiguity that produces a highly complex and contradictory dynamic in which issues of individuation, separation, and symbiotic union are played out in terms of a kind of identity crisis. On the one hand, auto-eroticism turns against the unification of two separate beings, while erotic activity between these twin halves might suggest incest. The struggle to disengage from each other represents the desire for individuation. All these different impulses are caught in a deep unresolved conflict. The desire for differentiation, autonomy and the difficulty of achieving it is part of the sado-masochistic dynamic. Personal recognition in sado-masochism is derived through dependency on the other—a dependency without clear-cut boundaries.

Sado-masochism can operate as a defense mechanism for deep psychic pain based on early childhood experiences of loss and abandonment, and often provides a substitute for a psychic breakdown while at the same time granting a person an illusory sense of self. Thus, representing an s/m dynamic can be a form of displacing real experiences of abandonment and loss. This dynamic is set up and played out in a number of ways in these

photographs. The doll is positioned in both sadistic and masochistic positions: 1. In the photographs in which the doll is set up in a masochistic position her abused condition becomes an image of exquisite purity—an innocent martyrdom in which tender depictions of her defilement often arouse an empathetic response from the viewer. Although in front of these photographs the male and female spectators are placed in a sadistic position, they can either identify with the masochistic doll, the sadistic (male) spectator, or oscillate between both positions. 2. Some of the photographs present the doll as a seductress. This *femme fatale* actively invites the male viewer to engage in a fantasized erotic scenario of female sexual dominance and male submission. Here the spectators are placed in a masochistic position and the doll in a sadistic one, and the same possibilities of identity mentioned above exist. 3. Both sides of the s/m dynamic exist within some of the photographs.[7] Since the doll is an image of adolescent sexuality that engages an adult viewer, all of these possible dynamics and scenarios suggest a potential for a fantasized incestuous encounter.

In some ways Bellmer's images interrupt more traditional representations of s/m, because they evoke an empathetic identification with the masochistic position (with feelings of psychic pain, loss and abandonment). Paradoxically, feelings that oscillate here between empathy and distance, attraction and repulsion are the very kinds of contradictions that constitute the s/m dynamic as Freud theorizes it. Thus, the s/m dynamic sets up the impossible place of being simultaneously inside and outside, close and distant, a dynamic that is always, already at a distance through the objectification of the self and the other. S/M relationships are based on a unique bond between people in which each partner is constituted by the other as an object and never as a subject. Sometimes people reverse roles or fantasize about the role they are not playing, internalizing it, projecting it from the other onto themselves. Thus, each position in the s/m dynamic can include, mask, or not acknowledge the desired other role.

The dominance/submission polarity is an exclusive bond that sets up difference in terms of hierarchies. The sadist's mask of indifference covers his symbiotic relationship to the masochist and his dependency on the masochist's dependency on him. The illusion of independence in sadism is the illusion of freedom associ-

ated with dominators. Yet what saves the viewer from an uncritical closeness to Bellmer's images is that s/m is displayed in a hyperbolic and highly theatrical and artificial manner, leaving no room for the viewer's suspension of disbelief. Feelings of fascination and repulsion are thus mirrored in a critical distance from the photographs which produce an alienated unidealized and fragmented identity that simultaneously creates a recognition and misrecognition—an alienation from and an identification with the image that intrudes upon the primary narcissism of the subject.

In the context of Nazi Germany's representation of women, the doll represents a perversion of the norm. In perversion, it is the struggle against figures and codes of authority that define the subject's difference from these powers; in Bellmer's doll, perversion becomes a critique of and a rebellion against Nazism: it is a sign of mournful disillusionment in the face of the enemy. As mentioned earlier, Bellmer's doll could represent the return of those who have been suppressed and repressed in Nazi Germany—an image of the effects and after-effects of Nazism. Traumatic reactions to a culture in moral crisis may take the form of nostalgic regressions back to childhood, where Freud situates the origins of perversion, claiming that people do not become perverse, but rather fixate and regress to earlier periods of infantile perversion. By creating the doll, Bellmer returns to a specific activity of childhood—doll playing—an activity that is almost exclusive to young girls in Western culture. Bellmer's fascination with young girls, dolls, and the activity of play suggests a narcissistic identification with them. Is it just by chance that the doll's face resembles Bellmer's? In *The Anatomy of the Image* Bellmer writes, "It is a question of the peculiar hermaphrodite interconnection between the male and female principles in which the female structure predominates. What is always vital is that the image of a woman must have been 'lived' [experienced] by the man in his own body before it can be 'seen' by the man."[8]

By recognizing the obvious parallels between Bellmer's "playing" with dolls and children's doll playing, we can explore how aesthetic activity relates to play and the symbolic. Adorno writes in *Aesthetic Theory,* "What lifts art above the context of immediate economic praxis and purposive behavior is the moment of play. Play, however, is also a throwback to infancy, if not animality.

Play in art represents both a renunciation of instrumental rationality and a regression behind it. . . .Forms of play are invariably forms of repetition. To enlist them as positive elements in art is to enlist a compulsion to repeat, confirming and reinforcing it."[9]

According to child psychologist Judith Kestenberg, one explanation for the etymology of the word "doll" is its derivation from the word "idol"; in ancient cultures, idols were inanimate representations of parental figures.[10] The mutilation of dolls is a common practice of 3-4 year olds during the anal-sadistic stage, and is linked with the idea of the doll's death. The death of the doll is connected to the death of the child (who identifies with the doll) and the death of the mother, since the doll at times represents the mother. By manipulating the roles of the doll—roles that might include having the doll act out parental behavior toward the child or the doll becoming the child and exhibiting what it would like to do to the mother—the child assumes a position of control and domination. This potential for role reversal in games with dolls is analogous to Bellmer's permutations of the doll's body and the roles he places her in.[11]

During the anal-sadistic stage the desire to enter and devour the mother is prominent.[12] This model of early childhood desire is especially applicable to an aspect of Bellmer's construction. During the formative stages of the doll, Bellmer began building a panorama inside its stomach. The six panoramic scenes that he envisioned were his own projected fantasies of what young girls desired. The doll's body functioned as a machine, a kind of viewing device, as a camera and photograph that reconstituted a remembered imaginary/real past. The structure of the body with an interior panorama represents fantasies of male penetration and the desire to manipulate, control, and possess the female body by trespassing its boundaries.

When physical and psychological boundaries are not enforced between parents and children, problems of separation, differentiation and identity arise that often lead to physical and psychological incest. On one level, role-playing with dolls is an attempt to set up, discover, reinforce, or break these boundaries. However, representing ruptured physical and psychic boundaries can also be a search and desire for boundaries by acknowledging their absence.

If Bellmer's representations are structured on an s/m dynamic, a dynamic which is dominant in Nazi social and political practices, how can the photographs of the doll operate as cultural critique? This is a difficult question that I can only begin to address here. Critical artistic practices are complex and contradictory often reproducing, in part, the very ideology they repudiate. By using the psychological terms of dominant culture, Bellmer's images can represent the oppressive conditions of dominant culture that they oppose. (I am not making a case for social realism!) However, we should remember that although s/m was repressed in Nazi art, it appeared in many other Nazi cultural, political and social contexts. In Bellmer's works, signifiers of femininity are flaunted to create a distance from a naturalized and essentialized role of woman that has been defined culturally as woman's closeness to her own image. The doll wears her femininity as a masquerade. By using naturalistic body parts to create unnaturalistic images of the *femme-enfant,* Bellmer produces a double vision, one that fluctuates between the real and the imaginary, and in which a critical, unresolved space between the representation of male fantasy and the actual social conditions between different groups of men and women and power structures are opened up. Investigating how power operates in and through representations of gender opens the possibilities of transforming repressive hierarchical structures and concepts into nonhierarchical and intersubjective formations of male and female subjectivity. The process of distanciation from psychic stereotypes produced by the interruption of physical stereotypes in Bellmer's doll photographs creates an exciting/excited alienation (in Brechtian terms), a second order alienation, the alienation of alienation, which can produce pleasure in an uncomfortable uncertainty.

Notes

1. Peter Webb, *Hans Bellmer* (London, 1985), p. 42.
2. Stephen Lackner, *Max Beckmann: Memories of a Friendship* (Florida, 1969), p. 21.
3. Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality,* The Complete Psychological Works, Hogarth (1955–64), Vol. VII, p. 159.
4. Jessica Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love* (New York, 1988), p. 53.
5. Theodor Reik, *Masochism and Modern Man* (New York, 1949), pp. 73–74.
6. Reik, p. 60.

7. For a discussion of female and male spectatorship, see Mary Ann Doane, "Film and the Masquerade: Theorizing the Female Spectator," *Screen* 23. 3–4 (Sept.–Oct. 1982), pp. 74–87.
8. Webb, p. 169.
9. Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* (London, 1984), p. 437. How do ethical questions regarding sado-masochism become established and evaluated when they are sublimated in artistic practices or self-conscious play rather than in real exchanges between people?
10. Judith S. Kestenberg, *Children and Parents: Psychoanalytic Studies in Development* (New York, 1975).
11. We should acknowledge that there are differences between children's play and adult play.
12. See Melanie Klein, "Early Stages of the Oedipus Conflict," *International Journal of Psychology*, 9, 1928, pp. 167–80.

CHRIS CUSTER

THEME: THE FREUDIAN EVE-&-ADAM

(for two voices, left/right: the first and last word of each line overlapping with those words of the other side for sound-syntax, echo and dream-juxtaposition)

A **B**

This in which A— awakens
This in which B— awakens
the movement of a flying figure
moths, one flutters against B—'s cheek
soundless allure backed by
B—'s wheezing breath fanning
the picturesque, the wild and dark
strands of hair shadowed over eyes
leveled, splayed to the bed's edge
as B—'s eyes acknowledge a dark web over
red hair splashed over a twin mattress
a bed not one's own. B—'s backside
and A—'s backside feeling scratchy
raw and precarious at the bed's edge
lush and strange, a sense of hackling
a sensation of prickly hairs, the sweat
not A—'s own, but an irritation
between B—'s chest and her back
stranger still, a warm coagulation
as B—'s mouth breathes into her
behind A—'s neck and through her hair
B—'s hot breath coming back at him

Though A— is laying on her right side
and though B— lays on his right side
a pull of gravity is at her backside
gravity pulls at B— away from her
under A—'s buttocks; his penis is still
knowing his unprotected cock is still in
inside her, still, its head there
snared snake-like, nowhere to slide
shovel-shaped and in untamed submission
dormant in a dark, inexorably wild
whether striking out or in is invasive
and damp, sleeping in its own emission
and bulbous-smooth as a thumbnail
the way a thumb presses milk from a spoon
the head curved like the back a spoon
like a spoon handle its neck is flat
its neck thin between A—'s legs and
caught between her thighs, obedient
not A—'s husband, but a perfect stranger
to a wicked seductress, not B—'s wife
a tall, dark, psychotic and not so perfect
the dark woman whose witchcraft suffocates
airlessly behind A— and possessive
her body curved as a thumb in a spoon
crablike his callous hand clamps
B— holds only to keep from falling
gripping the flesh of A—'s stomach
and as she breathes, the back of her
and these huge, suffocating fingers
reverberating with each breath
as if to feed or vegetate there
like a huge artery, her knotted spine
—crabgrass adulterates good earth
wedging until it divides his chest
A— felt it difficult to breathe
each sweep of breath like a pendulum
as A— awakens in an unfamiliar room
B— began to lose hold of his sleep
a dream A— will remember thinking
a dream B— hopes to remember later.

NUALA ARCHER

THE HOUR OF PAN/AMA

Her hunches hang-out

The same slit that zips the Pacific Ocean to the Atlantic unzips the connection between continents. The same canal that velcros, slashes. Both Atlantic and Pacific breezes wing their salt traces through her. For her, like rain, the setting is tropical. Water is sutured, land is unstitched. It was a horrific operation. The surgery was interminable. In 1965 she is 10 and lives where rain looms Pacific clearings. She will wave good-bye amidst the Atlantic's torrential downpour. Her good-bye-hat thrown from the ship drifts like an address card. A long-floating-fugue. She is told she is not where she is—*Place of many fishes*—Panamá. She is told she lives on the Isthmus, in the Canal Zone, in the U.S.A. She stares at the letters C.Z. A Crossroads. *At every stage of his career Gorgas seemed to confront the gaunt spectre of yellow fever. It was an important influence even in the love story of the doctor's life,* writes Marie Gorgas, his wife. Chagrinning clues amble toward their type face. The Chiclets she chewed climbing into clouds over Quito are a grey, uncomfortable gob in her mouth by the time the plane lands at Tocumen in 1960. Among first things in Panamá, she empties her mouth. Already the hibiscus, ilang-ilang and ginger have got her attention. Her ear is fluent to their accents & to the smells and sounds of Spanish. In school various possibilities are not discussed: that the canal might have been a rotten deal is a hush-hush. Also, the fear of letting go of canal control in the year 2000: another hush-hush. Galvanized by greed & a plague of power. The men who dug this particular ditch are still described in history books as geniuses. When she first hears the word *gringo,* she thinks it means *gangrene. JOSE, can*

you see, by the dawn's starry, starry? It is Olga who confirms the truth that she knows in her own bones. Her hunches hang-out. Some afternoons Olga says, *!BASTA!* & walks away from the moping mops and grackling kitchen. Twice, when the rest of the world disappeared to church, she spent a siesta with Olga in a hammock swinging beneath the green house built on stilts. She waits until after midnight. Then the house is quiet. Green & white tethered paths of light from the beacon at Albrook Air Force Base strip the palms and bougainvillea of their darkness. Night is striped: green & white, green & white, green & white. Blinkety-Blink. Blinkety-Blink. For a split-second a sloth hanging onto the Maytag's plumbing is transformed into an albino, then a glowing green-back. Blinkety-blank. Blinkety-blank. Our eyes catch & hold when we hear Olga's room referred to as "the maid's room" or *"cuarto de la criada."* I knock lightly. The door's unlocked. *What is made I unmade,* says Olga, laughing in perfectly broken English when she wants to.

Basking in the afterglow of the unmade room

The wildness of domes in Samarcand. The blue domes of Meshed & Isfahan. These curves, too, arc easily like violets between the crannies of the moment's quiet. I undo my braids. With Olga the dance of conversation is an aura of hues. Caring that isn't leather-cured. Many tongues & lambent tree whimsy. Humorous iguanas. The ache is part of breathing. We take our chances. Olga removes her nail-polish. She's promised to braid my hair. I peel an orange for her. Here armpits are always wet. Panamá's a great place to learn about sweat. Even first thing in the morning Olga's shirt is grayly half-mooned. I listen to Olga tell about her mother. *When she arrived she didn't know she was going to be put to work covering rain barrels and cleaning out gutters. Fumigating houses & dumping disinfectant down privies.* Fronds of palms clack at us softly. Even without a verandah the bay gleams opalescent as the neck of an immense pigeon. *She said it was like arriving into the heart of a plague. Everyone was dying. At breakfast she'd look around & think, who's*

missing. She wasn't being funny. She wanted to know. Malaria, dysentery, yellow fever, trachoma, hookworm, red tape. It was the language of her childhood. The sound of folks flumped into coffins. Everyone in Panamá was cracked on the subject of mosquitoes. She said she was going to watch everything. Somebody had to remember how a groove was ripped through a mountain range in order to join two oceans. No cost was too great, they said. Witness to the making of a sadscape. Such an egg-timer's-waist-of-a-place. Such a topographical hammock between trees. *NO PAST is part & parcel of colonization, she said. Perpetuity is its green-eyed monster. The Cucaracha Slide, in cahoots with the Culebra Cut, keeps sliding.* The brutality of immigrant dreams. Seizing the American teddy bear. Tyrannical teddy bear. And the triangular white-tipped shark fins of Freddy the flintstone. But who would have expected seals covered with boils? One weekend we went to a carnival. Scanning a crowd, on the verge of recognizing a friend, a great hollow roar of rain swept down. No sound travels through such thunder. Then, as quickly, a sunlit drizzle emerged out of the lashing. In this steaming land, rain is equally all-obliterating & connecting. In a click, a curtain & a clearing, but the dribble-dribble-dribble of the now vanished recent roar lingers in our ears. The sound of rain is always the background to our hearing. We walk down side streets that narrow into squashy shades of incessant talk tattooing time into open-ended space. The rain isn't heavy now, & it makes little noise as it falls like fine oil. No window works on the train home. All surfaces are gritty. Peanut shells, orange peel, cigar butts, stippling spittle. The myth about Yanqui trains is that they're clean, fast, even. And on time. Outside our window it's all historic & dull. Muddy & unspeakably depressing. Enough to flummox anybody. The sweetest skiddoo of truth is this stink. Fed up with high school, a zone kid is talking loud about his leaving to slave away at Wal-Mart as a minimum wage servant from hell. A month later he begins another job making stone critters out of hydrastone. He makes the critters look almost real, pouring the hydrastone into molds. In six months he has full health insurance. Dental, too. And a raise & some bonus pay for making so many critters over & above the needed amount. Chewbone. Chewbone. Axle grease & cotton candy. Zombification. Lightning is doing its usual X-ray pyro-technics, teasing sculpted shrub-stuff toward a nappy

doo or the really plastic look of magnetic letters on a fridge. Lightning's topiary styles are abstract & improvisational.

Scatteration's Autobiography

Stopping. And listening to grasses growing. Scatteration opened me, howled through me. Then a great emptiness began to happen. Meaning's arrival no longer mattered. A palpable desolation blossomed the way kisses or a body brings tears. I travelled through centuries. Aquí. A key. A quay. Akee. No more than flukes, no less than flotsam. Winds returned only the silence of scatteratión. Then a great emptiness began to happen. A great emptying. Like bivalves on a storm-varnished beach. I watched myself open. Almost imperceptibly. I saw that heart-rending smile. I could no longer ignore what I knew. Walking like a flayed deer through fire. We circulated way outside the thousands of miniscule safeguards of privilege. And the canal, of its own accord, crumbled. Green flames of Catherine wheels opened into red flowers & domes of indigo. In the swamp of history's spittle. Her sweet weight on my heart at night. Dreaming of a window & a stretch of land for land's sake, I scuttled the whole notion of achievement for an archipelago that pointed toward an unchartered sea that the waves conceal, reveal at *whim. Dozing in the depths of wakefulness, in the warmth of each other. Alive, living in two worlds. More like three.* Amidst Panamá's weird sunrises and sunsets. At dusk the orange floppy of fire drops precipitately behind the verdant Cordillera—into the Atlantic Ocean. And each warm tropical morning the same floppy rises suddenly up in the East—out of the Pacific Ocean. Some friends are still ingrained & sleeping. The table with the bowl of moon is breathing. Olga & I are walking through walls. My childhood in Panamá didn't hit me until I woke up elsewhere.

Panama, Panamá

No matter which way I turn, the jungle is always somewhere near, just behind me or to my side, reaching, reaching. I read to her the *Estrella de Panamá,* the Spanish side & the English side both. Her warm eyes are lovely & dark. The screen door stays open so we can watch the saffron finch. We do nothing in a hurry. Drawers are often stuck, roofs leak. Christmas in Panamá. Sounds sense. The piece of ice from Boston costs more than a long-distance call. Clouds of tiny brown and purple butterflies tumble across the slit of sunshine from the jungle on one side to the jungle on the other. Silent, tangled, yet remarkably synchronized, creating a gentle breeze against our cheeks. Roots lift knobby elbows & knees toward these brown and purple wings. Screeches & scritches & high-singing sounds. Birds wrangle & scold. Amber colors whistle in green-black foliage. Blinking, startled monkeys squeegee the corridor of sunlight with their leaving. Orchids nod. Wet moss hangs lank. Insects everywhere. An alternative to Koka Kola, the Rio Chagres overflows her own banks luxuriously. Her dark throat is a constant chuckle. We are already supposed to be dead. We continue breathing. We imagine the bragging vengeance of the West vaccinated to a residue. A desert of voices springs from the egg-timer's waist. Square edges of individual grains are ground down, uncubed. Mileage into the past & future of quiet bestows flexible forms. Like pieces of a hologram each grain unfolds facets far beyond the proportion of its size. Tentative. Our touch interrupts history's spittle. Amnesia & avoided eyes acquiesce to remembering. Turpentine truths. Earthquakes. Fires purr, flowers chatter acknowledging the colors of our kisses.

MARJORIE WELISH

SCALPEL IN HAND

1
Let us effect a moratorium on things.

Let us say
an object is not an image, aerodynamically speaking.

Let us say
"Speak, or be silent."

Let us legislate
"the sound elements in a spoken language."

For argument's sake,
let us say the craze for black
may be dazed with shape, size and color of commodity.

For argument's sake,
the flutter of nearby bleeding does not render the charcoal
lemon tragic,
although the eclipse of the tragic by subject matter
may be eligible for illustration by Grandville;
"an object is not an image."
Say the subtly bled shape does not induce suffering in lemons,
however
blackened, however centrally massed the putative anguish.
Let us legislate anguish,
let us say "anguish" in unison very loud.
In a spoken language, syllables are extinguished
once gathered by the silhouette dissembling death.

2
In the center, rays from the sun and much still life
denied body, denied pantomime
and yet much language whenever and wherever

land radii. Abstract and sanitary bodilessness.
If no evidence, if no physiognomic
ignition, then just what does the author mean?

In conversation with the author, find
a charcoal axis drawn *soto voce,* denied body,
denied yet blurting out whatever unjustly perishable

sacrifice or contingency,
much ostension of cipher
and rays of the sun.

3
An object is not an image,
aerodynamically speaking.
Verblessness in Miro's mind
reserving passive
rather than active tawdriness
of those sparse
accoutrements in free fall.
Silent in this falling through,
object and image:
snails versus "snails'
genitals in the form of stars,"
depending on how we construe
the stunning,
vanishing magnitude.

In vanishing magnitude,
pastoralists departing quietly.
Depending on our construal,
stars in exhaustion
and genitals suspended on a string.
Ephemera, illustrate this.

Free fall, illustrate this,
scalpel in hand,
in an acutely skeptical reading
of the snail incised with dotted
passivity in tawdriness,
the object obsolescent, abject or gone.
When is an object not an object?

RENE CHAR

TWELVE POEMS

(Tr. from the French by Gustaf Sobin)

Cherishing Thouzon

When sorrow had hoisted him up onto his coveted rooftop, a simple evidence, mistlessly, came clear. He was no longer free as two oars in the middle of an ocean. The spellbinding desire of speech had, along with the black waters, subsided. He followed the diminished wake of the slight tremblings that, here and there, still persisted. Half-masked, a granite dove measured with its wings the scattered remains of the great, engulfed work. Upon the damp slopes, the trail of foam and the indigent course of broken forms. In the stringent era that had just opened, the right to harvest without the use of poisons would be outlawed. The rush of all the free and raving streams of creation had completely ceased. At the end of his life he would have to yield to the new audacity everything that immense patience, with each dawn, had granted him. The day whirled about Thouzon. Unlike the lichen, death hasn't eradicated all hope of snow. In the hollow of the immersed town, the moon's horn was mixing the last blood with the first clay.

From *Retour amont* (Gallimard, 1966).

Mirage of the Needles

They take for clarity the yellow laughter of the darkness. They weigh in their hands the remnants of death, and cry out: "that's not for us." No precious viaticum studs the jaw of their uncoiled snakes. They're deceived by their wives, robbed by their children, mocked at by their friends. Loathing obscurity, they notice nothing. Does the diamond of creation glitter obliquely? Quickly, then, cover it with some distraction. They push into their ovens, and add to the smooth dough of their bread only a pinch of wheaten despair. They've settled and thrived within the cradle of a sea where others have mastered the glaciers. You are forewarned.

How, frail schoolboy, convert the future and rake out this fire that, so questioned, so stirred, has fallen onto your faulty gaze?

The present is only a game or a massacre of archers.

Ever since, faithful to his love as the sky is to the rock. Faithful, fuse-bearing, but ceaselessly vagrant, concealing his course throughout the entire expanse revealed by the fire and maintained by the wind: the expanse, that butcher's hoard, that bleeds from its hook.

At the Gateways of Aerea

It was a happy time! Each city was an enormous family that fear united; that the song of hands at work and the living night of the sky illuminated. The pollen of the spirit kept for itself its share of exile.

But the perpetual present, the instantaneous past, under a dominant exhaustion, removed the hand-rails.

Forced march to a scattered end. Whipped children, golden thatch, sanious men, all to the wheel! Aimed at by the iron bee, the rose in tears has broken open.

The Vicinities of Alsace

I showed you La Petite-Pierre, the dowry of her forest, the
sky that is born in her branches,
The richness of her birds, hunter of other birds,
The pollen twice alive beneath the blaze of its flowers,
A tower hoisted far off like the sail of a corsair,
The lake that's once again the mill's cradle, the infant's sleep.

There, burdened by my belt of snow,
Beneath the visor of a rock speckled by crows,
I left the needs of winter.
We love one another today without either lineage or future,
Ardent or effaced, different but together,
Turning from the stars whose nature is to fly without arriving.

The ship makes its way towards the high, vegetal sea.
All lights extinguished, it takes us aboard.
We were up before dawn in its memory.
It protected our childhood, ballasted our golden age,
Beckoned, this itinerant host, for as long as we believe in its truth.

Convergence of Multiples

This man wasn't generous because he wished to see himself so in his mirror. He was generous because he came from the Pleiades, and because he detested himself.

The same prodigious shadow, with its phalanges of uplifted fingers, joined the two of us together. A sun, scarcely ours, vanished like a guilty or an ungratified father.

The Merciful Thirst

Whoever heard her complain?

No one but she could have drunk for forty hardships without
dying,
Waiting, far off, for those who'd later succumb.
Her bearing, from dawn to dusk, was virile.

Whoever digs the well and lifts the still water
Risks his heart in the spreading of his hands.

Celebrating Giacometti

At the end of that afternoon in April, 1964, the old despotic eagle, the kneeling blacksmith under the flaming cloud of his curses (thrashing his work—himself, that is—with endless insults) showed me, on the very floor of his studio, the figure of Caroline,

his model, Caroline's face on canvas—after how many scratches, wounds, bruises?—the fruit of passion above all love's objects, triumphant over that mock enormity of death's swept up scraps; over, too, those luminous, scarcely separated particles, ours, the itinerant witnesses. Outside that cell of cruelty and desire. This handsome face, without a past and on its way to murder sleep, reflected in the mirror of our gaze, the momentary, all-embracing recipient for every future eye.

Septentrion

—I walked along the edge of the Folie.—

To the questions of my heart,
If none were forthcoming,
My companion yielded,
So inventive is absence.
And her eyes at ebb like the violet Nile
Seemed to be endlessly counting their tokens
Spread out underneath the fresh stones.

The Folie dressed itself with long, tapering reeds.
Somewhere this stream lived its double life.
Suddenly invasive, the cruel gold of its name
Came to wage battle against adverse fortune.

Lied of the Fig Tree

So much it froze that the milky branches
Hurt the saw, and snapped in the hands.
Spring didn't see the gracious ones turn green.

From the master of the felled, the fig tree
Asked for the shrub of a new faith.
But the oriole, its prophet,
The warm dawn of his return,
Alighting upon the disaster,
Instead of hunger, died of love.

October's Judgment

Cheek to cheek, two vagabonds, stiff in their distress,
Schooled by neither wind nor frost, and unheeded;
Children of another time,
Fallen from spent seasons and huddled there, on end.
Without lips to transpose them, the hours turn.
They won't be either cursed or coveted, and
Whoever passes will pass without noticing them, without noticing us.
Two roses, drilled with a deep-set ring
Add to their oddity a touch of defiance.
Can anything, aside from the thorns, put an end to life?
As the long days always knew: the flower!
And the sun has ceased to initiate.
One night, the day low, the entire risk, two roses
Like the flame within its shelter, cheek to cheek with whatever kills it.

Slowness of the Future

One has to scale so much ice and dogma before attaining pleasure and awaking—flushed—on the stone of the bed.

For some time there'd been, between them and me, something like a wild hedge. We were free to pick and offer one another its flowering hawthorn. But never further than a hand's, an arm's length. They loved me just as I loved them. What was it, though, that obstacle *to the wind* in which my full strength failed? It was a nightingale that first revealed this to me, then carrion.

Death in life is repugnant, incompatible; death, however, within death is something accessible, is nothing: a frightened belly could crawl there without trembling.

I have overthrown the last wall, the one that encircles the snow nomads, and I see—o my very first parents—the candlestick's summer.

Our figure on earth is only the second third of a continuous pursuit, a point, upland.

Servant

You are once again the candle where the darkness settles about a new insurgent, You against whom a whip rises, infuriated by your clarity that weeps.

MAURICE BLANCHOT

TRANSLATING

(Tr. from the French by Richard Sieburth)

Are we aware of the full extent of our debt to translators and, even more so, to translations? We are only dimly aware. And even though we feel grateful to those men who valiantly enter into the enigma that is the task of translating, even though we salute them from afar as the hidden masters of our culture and are bound to them in obedient submission to their zeal, our gratitude remains silent, somewhat disdainful, if only out of humility, for we are not in a position to acknowledge our debt. Drawing on Walter Benjamin's excellent essay on "The Task of the Translator," I shall venture a few remarks on this particular form of our literary activity, an original form at that; and even though one rightly or wrongly continues to claim that it is poets or novelists or even critics who are responsible for maintaining the meaning of literature, one should also count in translators, writers of the rarest sort, truly without peers.

Translating, I might remind you, has long seemed, among certain spheres of culture, a malicious undertaking. There are those who object to any translation into their language, and others who object to any translation from their language, and war must break out in order for this treason, in the proper sense, to be committed: that of delivering the true speech of a people over to foreigners. (Remember Eteocles's desperate plea [in *Seven Against Thebes*]: "Do not uproot my city, fallen into enemy hands, where the mother tongue of Hellas echoes through the sanctuary of our homes.") But the translator is guilty of an even greater impiety. Enemy of God, he claims to be rebuilding the Tower of Babel, ironically profiting from the divine punishment that separates men from each other by the confusion of tongues. There was a time when it was believed one could in this fashion make one's way back to some originary language, to an ultimate word which it

would suffice to utter in order to speak the truth. Benjamin retains something of this dream. Languages, he observes, all intend the same reality but not in the same mode. When I say *Brot* and when I say *pain*, I intend the same thing but in different modes. Taken singly, languages are incomplete. In translating, I am not merely content to replace one mode by another, one means by another means, rather I gesture toward some higher language which would constitute the harmony or the complementary unity of these different modes of intention, a language that would ideally speak at the juncture of the mysterious reconciliation of each and every language spoken by each and every work. Hence the messianism that characterizes every translator who would labor to make languages grow in the direction of this ultimate language whose existence is attested to by the fact that every present language already contains within itself a future that translation seizes.

Which is clearly a utopian play of ideas, since it supposes that each language has a single identical mode of intention whose signification is always the same and that all these modes of intention could somehow become complimentary. But Benjamin is suggesting something different: every translator lives off the difference between languages, every translation is founded on this difference, even while appearing to pursue the perverse design of doing away with difference. (A well-translated work is praised in two opposite fashions: one either says of it that it does not read like a translation, or one marvels at just how identical it is with its original, how it is truly one and the same work; but in the first case one effaces the origin of the work to the advantage of the new language, and in the second case, one effaces the originality of either language to the advantage of the work; in both cases, something essential gets lost.) In truth, translation is in no way destined to make difference disappear. On the contrary, translation is the sheer play of difference: it constantly makes allusion to difference, dissimulates difference, but by occasionally revealing and often accentuating it, translation becomes the very life of this difference, and it is under the spell of this difference that translation discovers its august duty whenever it proudly sets out to bring the two languages closer together through its own power of unification, a power like that of Hercules drawing together the two shores of the sea.

But there is more to be said: a work is not yet ready for or worthy of translation unless it harbors this difference within itself in some available fashion, whether it be because it originally gestures toward some *other* language, or because it gathers within itself in some privileged manner those possibilities of being different from itself or foreign to itself which every living language possesses. The original is never stationary, and all the futurity that is contained within a language at a given moment, everything in this language that designates or calls out for another state, sometimes a dangerously other state—all this asserts itself in the solemn drift and derivation *[dérive]* of literary works. Translation is bound up with this process of becoming, translation "carries" it "across," "carries" it "on," accomplishes it; indeed, translation is only made possible by this movement and life that it lays hold of, sometimes to release it purely, sometimes to capture it at great pains. As to those classical masterpieces that belong to languages no longer spoken, they are all the more in need of translation inasmuch as they are now the sole storehouses of the life of a dead language and the sole guarantors of the future of a language with no future. These works live only in translation; what's more, even in their original language, they are always as it were being retranslated and reaccompanied back toward that which is most their own: their original foreignness.

The translator is a writer whose singular originality lies in the fact that he seems to make no claim to any. He is the secret master of the difference of languages, a difference he is not out to abolish, but rather one he puts to use as he brings violent or subtle changes to bear on his own language, thus awakening within it the presence of that which is at origin different in the original. Likeness, as Benjamin rightly says, is not at issue here: if one requires that the translated work resemble the work to be translated, no literary translation is possible. What is involved, rather, is an identity that takes off from an alterity: the same work in two languages foreign to each other, and this mutual foreignness thus making visible the movement by which this work always becomes *other,* the very motion from which must be drawn the light which will transparently illuminate the translation.

Yes, the translator is an odd, nostalgic creature who, aware of what his own language lacks, experiences in it all the present af-

firmations promised by the original work (a work which, moreover, he will never be able to quite attain, since he is not at home in it, but an eternal guest). Which accounts for the fact that, according to specialists, the translator is always far more hampered by the language to which he belongs than he is hindered by the one which he does not possess. Not only does he see all there is that is lacking in French (for example) in order for it to rejoin the dominion of a given foreign text, but he has also now come to possess this French in a privative fashion, as a language nonetheless enriched by a deficit he has to make up by using the resources of another language that has in turn been rendered other as it momentarily gathers itself into a single work.

Commenting on a theory of Rudolf Pannwitz, Benjamin cites the following surprising statements: "our translations even the finest ones proceed from a false premise they want to germanize sanskrit greek english instead of sanskritizing hellenizing anglicizing german. They have far greater reverence for the usages of their own language than for the spirit of the foreign work. . .the fundamental error of the translator is that he stabilizes the state in which his own language happens to find itself instead of allowing his language to be powerfully jolted by the foreign language." A proposition or claim that is dangerously attractive. It implies that every language could become all other languages, or at least displace itself without harm into all sorts of new directions; it assumes that the translator will discover enough resources in the work to be translated as well as enough authority within himself in order to bring about this abrupt mutation; it supposes a translation that will be all the more free and all the more innovative to the extent that it is capable of observing a greater verbal or syntactical *literality* which, pushed to the limit, would render translation useless.

But the fact remains that Pannwitz can back up his point of view by appealing to names as powerful as those of Luther, Voss, Hölderlin, George, none of whom were afraid in their work as translators to break through the bounds of the German language in order to broaden its frontiers. The example of Hölderlin shows the kind of risk run in the end by someone under the spell of the power of translating: his translations of *Antigone* and *Oedipus* were virtually his last works, written on the verge of madness, yet

they were extremely well thought out and executed, extremely deliberate, undertaken with the unflinching intent not to transport the Greek text into German nor to lead the German language back to Greek sources, but rather to unify these two powers, respectively representing the vicissitudes of the Occident and those of the Orient, into the simplicity of a language both total and pure. The result very nearly fills one with awe. One seems to discover between the two languages an agreement so deep, a harmony so fundamental that it substitutes itself for meaning, or rather that it manages to make a new meaning originate in the hiatus opened up between the two languages. The effect is so overwhelming that one can well understand Goethe's snickers. Whom was Goethe snickering at? At a man who was no longer a poet or translator, but who was recklessly advancing toward that center where he believed the pure power of unification lay gathered, a center that just might make sense above and beyond any determinate, limited meaning. One understands why this temptation should have presented itself to Hölderlin via translation; for the man who is ready to translate is in a constant, perilous, admirable intimacy with that unifying power at work in every practical relation as well as in every language, a power that at the same time exposes him to sheer originary scission; and this familiarity bestows on the translator the right to be the proudest or most secretive of writers—given the conviction that translating is, in the end, madness.

(From *L'Amitié,* Gallimard, 1971)

MARJORIE PERLOFF

WORD FLASH

Judi Freeman, *The Dada & Surrealist Word-Image,* with a contribution by John C. Welchman. Exhibition catalogue, Los Angeles County Museum of Art. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989), 144 pp.

Renée Riese Hubert, *Surrealism and the Book* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1988). –

Marcel Broodthaers, ed. Marge Goldwater and Michael Compton (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center; New York, Rizzoli, 1989). –

Broodthaers: Writings, Interviews, Photographs, ed. Benjamin H.D. Buchloch *(October,* 42 [Fall 1987], Cambridge, MA: MIT Press). –

Johanna Drucker, *The Word Made Flesh* (Cambridge, MA: Bow & Arrow Press, 1989). ✶

> —We hang out with a crowd called Dadaists and some called Surrealists—for my part, I don't see much difference between them.
>
> —Kiki of Montparnasse, *Memoirs*[1]

A full-page ad on the back page of the *New York Times* (12 July 1989) announces that "the greatest art patrons since Lorenzo de Medici" contribute to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA). These greatest of patrons range from the usual sus-

pects—AT&T, Occidental Petroleum, and the Ford Motor Company—to such "Corporate Members" as Century Parking, Inc., Regal Rents, Inc., the Transo Envelope Company, and the Z Valet & Shuttle Service. Bold typeface links these corporations with "Pope Julius II and 23 Egyptian Pharaohs," and the ad informs prospective donors that "We think of [our corporate members] as artists in a supporting role. . . .In return for their appreciation of art, we provide them with a palette of rare opportunities for corporate expression. . . .Call Jane Auerbach at (213) 857-6150. Tell her that your company wants to make art history."

To paraphrase Magritte's great *La Trahison des images ("Ceci n'est pas une pipe")*, which is the centerpiece of LACMA's summer show *The Dada & Surrealist Word-Image*, this is not advertising copy. "Corporate expression" is by no means confined to Wells Fargo and the Z Valet & Shuttle Service: increasingly, it is the language of the museum itself. Thus the Director of LACMA, Earl A. Powell III, declares in his Foreword to *Word-Image:* "Considered collectively, Dada and surrealist word-images represent the first moment in the history of art in which language occupied a critical, catalytic role in visual imagery" (p. 6). Powell is evidently echoing the show's curator, Judi Freeman, who begins her essay with the assertion, "And suddenly there was the word. Its appearance in the visual arts in the early twentieth century as an integral part of a painting or a sculpture, yet an independent element in its own right, was something new" (p. 13).

Across the plaza from the Anderson Building where *Word-Image* is housed, stands the huge Disneyworldish Japanese Pavilion, opened with much fanfare in 1987: non-Western art, after all, now plays a major role in "corporate expression." But somehow those "first moments in the history of art" Powell speaks of don't manage to make it to the other side of the plaza: think, for instance, of the Japanese hanging scrolls of the thirteenth and fourteenth century, like this one by Shogun Ashikaga Takauji (figure 1).[2] Here on paper decorated with cloud patterns, creating the illusion of deep space, are five columns of text. The first two contain the colophon; the three on the right, written in *kana* syllabary, contain Takauji's poem, which has been translated as follows:

Atop Mount Takano
the religious candle
will never be extinguished;
in the future world, whoever the ruler,
it will shine as brightly.

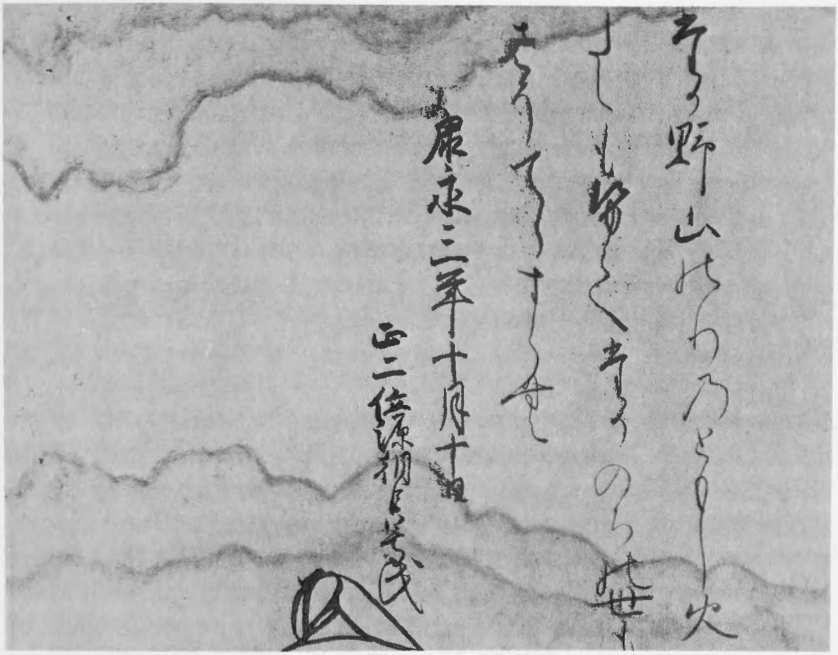

Figure 1

Not only does this poem correspond to the visual composition of the scroll; the very calligraphy repeats the forms and outlines of mountains and clouds.

Such word-image relationships are, of course, as central to Japanese as to Chinese art (as, for that matter, to Islamic art or to Medieval illuminated manuscripts), but one would never know it reading Judi Freeman's essay. "The moment in the history of art when Dada and surrealism emerged," she writes, ". . .coincided with attempts in the arts to undermine artistic convention" (p. 13). Presumably this differentiates "Dada and surrealism" from, say, the Baroque or the Pre-Raphaelite, which evidently *didn't* undermine artistic convention. Indeed, for Freeman, the art world B.D./B.S. (Before Dada, Before Surrealism): is characterized as follows:

> The van Eycks and the Vermeers of earlier centuries—those Renaissance and baroque artists who devoted their careers to the creation of compositions of multiple meanings—were succeeded by generations of artists who were, relatively speaking, less interested in evoking religious or moral parables than they were in evoking moods and states of mind or in creating political tableaux. The number of iconographically rich pictures dwindled considerably in the nineteenth century as artists, prompted by their audiences, demonstrated a preference for clearly identifiable symbols in painting: flags, tombstones, middle-class interiors, famous figures associated with specific political persuasions. The viewer saw the picture and *understood it in a single viewing;* the title perhaps restated and underscored the picture's message. (pp. 15-16; my emphasis)

So much for Goya's *Disasters of War* series or Manet's *Bar at the Follies Bergère*—those "iconographically" poor pictures whose "clearly identifiable symbols" can evidently be "understood in a single viewing," and whose titles evidently "restate and underscore the picture's message." As for "the van Eycks and the Vermeers of earlier centuries," the plural designation (was there indeed any other painter like Van Eyck or Vermeer?) suggests that the artist is primarily known by his group identity, rather like those Distinguished Patrons, Corporate Associates, Corporate Regents, and Corporate Members listed in the LACMA advertisement.

The identifying characteristic of "arthistory speak," in any case, seems to be the footnote, guaranteeing, so it would seem, that expert "scholarship" is involved. There are 69 footnotes in Freeman's 30-page essay and 106 in John C. Welchman's "After the Wagnerian Bouillabaisse: Critical Theory and the Dada and Surrealist Word-Image." This latter essay, which, according to the note, "contains material from a Ph.D. dissertation in progress for the Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London," stands in an almost parodic relationship to the first. Whereas Freeman, who evidently commissioned Welchman's essay, complains that "Recent scholarship on Dada and surrealism—particularly on their word-images—is cloaked in structuralist and poststructuralist

rhetoric. Much of this writing seeks to impose the complex canons of these approaches upon art and literature" (p. 15), Welchman is quick to announce that his own essay will "utilize certain terms and critical methods that have been identified as poststructuralist. These terms include *discourse, textuality,* and *practice"* (p. 57). Essay 2, it would seem, directly contradicts the premises of Essay 1. Or is this "take your pick" approach another aspect of intentional "corporate expression"?

By its own account, Welchman's essay gives us "no lengthy discussions of individual works or oeuvres and no pursuit of strict chronological order" (p. 57). Rather, Dada and Surrealism matter primarily because they contain the seeds of poststructuralist theory, specifically, that of Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze/Guattari, and Baudrillard. Here are some sample statements:

> 1. It is currently being recognized that Dada was already mobilizing an opposition to the logic of modernism even as the modernist regime was still in formation and even in its heyday. (p. 59)
>
> 2. The Dada and surrealist moment was one of radical interdiscursivity, a moment in other words, in which the historically codified regimes of art practice—genres. . .styles. . .even avant-gardes (symbolism, fauvism, cubism)—were disrupted and collapsed, although they were never wholly subverted or entirely relegated. (p. 61)
>
> 3. Emerging from the militaristic futilities and social deregulations of World War I, Dada and surrealism confronted in equal measure (or with equal abandon) the positivism, narrativity, and rationalism of the institutional discourse of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, *as well as,* the neorationality of formalism and structuralism, *and* the antirationalism of mysticism and the occult. (p. 61)
>
> 4. Schwitters also used the process of collage to deform *(entformung) as well as to make form.* (p. 65)

> 5. For Dada in particular a heterological critical practice is needed that answers to—though does not merely mimic in the way of so much "empathetic" Dada commentary—the constellation of visual, linguistic, and discursive forms that circulate, play, and dissolve in the tumult of Dada. . . .Most of the activities of Dada and surrealism cannot be reduced to the system of denotative (one-to-one) reference that so often satisfies the academic mind.

And so on. Picabia, Duchamp, Schwitters—these Dada artists, all of them well represented in the show itself, would surely have had a field-day with Welchman's artspeak. It is amusing, for example, to conceive of a Dada battalion "mobilizing" against the "modernist regime," given that the writers and artists we now think of as the great Modernists—Stein and Joyce, Brecht and Kafka, say, or Picasso and Klee and Kandinsky—were themselves all but unknown at the time of the Cabaret Voltaire or its Paris and Hanover aftermath, and given that the bourgeois art establishment of the period was, of course, as hostile to the second group as the first. But it is even more absurd to describe "Dada and surrealism" as "confront[ing] in equal measure" the "neorationality of formalism and structuralism" and the "antirationalism of mysticism and the occult." In the first case, the *isms* to be confronted had not yet been thought of; in the second, Welchman ignores the very large role "mysticism and the occult" did play in Surrealism. Indeed, *Dada-and-surrealism,* as it is regularly called in the *Word-Image* catalogue, has become a sort of buzz-word, a mere cipher for all that is *contra* in the game of "interdiscursivity," "commutivity," or "heterology," a term Welchman borrows, without any real understanding from the late Michel de Certeau. The combination of solemn-eyed theoretical abstraction and factual error (the German word *entformung* [example 3 above] is a noun meaning *deformation,* not the verb *deform)* is deadly, especially in the case of the wonderfully *heterogeneous* art/literature/music we associate with Dada. Thus Welchman is so busy comparing Picabia's "machinic portraits," as he calls them, to the "texted diagrams" of Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus,* that he neglects to pose such obvious and essential questions as the relationship of

Picabia's "machinic" to, say, the constructivist aesthetic of Tatlin and Rodchenko. Dada, he claims, "displace[s]" the "old-style (and modernist) *descriptio* by a nonmodern *destructus* (p. 95). *Descriptio/destructus:* the terms have a Monsieur Antipyrine (aka Tristan Tzara) ring, as in:

preamble = sardanapalus
one = suitcase
woman = women
trousers = water
if = moustache
(Descriptio = destructus)
2 = three[3]

Such insertion may remind us that before Dada was appropriated into the discourse of "radical interdiscursivity" and "unstandard stoppages," it was a term coined by a group of young artists who, as the "word-images" in the exhibition (roughly from Marinetti to Magritte) testify, actually had a great deal of fun.

It is a relief to turn from the LACMA catalogue to Renée Riese Hubert's meticulous *Surrealism and the Book.* Although Hubert limits herself to poets and visual artists loosely associated with the Surrealist movement in France, she is careful not to treat this or any other *ism* as ideological entity or distinct historical time-frame. "We may wonder," she suggests at the outset, "whether the term *surrealism* adequately designates the work of an artist throughout his life. Is [Max] Ernst the illustrator of [Paul] Eluard in the twenties the same surrealist who thirty years later illustrated Lewis Carroll?" Indeed, "Terms such as *surrealist book, surrealist illustration,* even *surrealist painting* provide no more than convenient handles quite devoid of ontological significance" (p. 16). Instead, the works in question are grouped under the loose umbrella of the *antimimetic,* the visual image no longer serving, as it had in the typical nineteenth-century book, to "illustrate" or provide "graphic paraphrase" of the text. Indeed, since such "antimimetic" poems as René Char's or Benjamin Peret's could not, strictly speaking, be "illustrated" to begin with, it would be more correct to say that the antimimetic, whether in the verbal or the visual text, reflects a larger cultural and ideological shift.

Surrealism and the Book is, in any case, concerned not with theoretical or historical issues but with refined close reading of specific poetic texts vis-à-vis their visual counterparts. After a brief look at precursors, Hubert begins with collaborations; for example, the Paul Eluard-Max Ernst *Les Malheurs des Immortels* (1922). Here "verbal collage confronts visual collage page by page, but without providing clues to their interaction" (p. 21). And further: the verbal text is itself composite, juxtaposing Ernst's sentence fragments and citations from other poets, with prose poems by Eluard. In *Les Eventails brisés,* for example, Eluard's *"Les crocodiles d'à présent ne sont plus des crocodiles"* has as its visual counterpart "a crocodile in its stretched-out position, far away from water, upside down, with a bicycle-like contraption in lieu of its stomach. . .Text and collage jointly contribute to the destruction of identity" (p. 65). The cyclist in the collage, who seems to sport a crocodile-scale tunic, is presented as just as powerless as the crocodile; only the machine, inside which the cyclist pedals, seems to have energy. Then, too, as Hubert shows, the *éventail* of the title provides the complex play on the unfolding of parts that takes place in both the collage and the poem; for example, *Autrefois, les bons vieux poissons portaient aux nageoiries de beaux souliers rouges* ("In the past, the good old fish wore pretty red shoes on their fins"). Visually, the unfolding of the fans results in collapse; verbally, Hubert argues, the same thing happens "as lines or words always fall short of providing the expected results" (p.67). Indeed, "text and image cannot be decoded separately but . . .only in terms of their mutual interference" (p. 68).

A somewhat different strategy is found in the gorgeous *Facile* (1935), in which a series of love poems by Paul Eluard is "illustrated" by Man Ray's solarized photographs of a nude young woman by Man Ray. In this *photopoème,* as Hubert following Nicole Boulestreau calls it, meaning depends upon "the reciprocity of writing and figures," this time coexisting on the page itself. Lines like *Tu te lèves l'eau se déplie* ("You arise, the water unfolds") have analogues in the "liquid" undulations of the woman's body in the Man Ray photograph (p. 78); a passage like "Couché aux pieds de son reflect / Un couple illimité" (Lying at the feet of its reflection / a limitless couple) may refer to the peculiar cropping of the photographs in which the fluid contours of the female

body, sometimes rendered transparent, sometimes opaque, move out beyond the picture frame. The dominant note, whether of text or of image, is of erotic mystery, the Surrealist poet/painter's dream of "Tranquille sève nue" ("Tranquil naked vitality"). Hubert might have added that such "erotic mystery" may now strike us as a shade voyeuristic, depending as it does on the fetishization of the female body, a body designed to pleasure the male artist for whom the woman is, in Eluard's words, "Mon petit feu charnel." Indeed, those like John Welchman, who dwell on the revolutionary ruptures of Surrealism, often forget that Surrealist sexual politics was at least as retrograde as the "bourgeois Modernism" it supposedly "exploded."

What really *is* new in the Surrealist book, however, is the "double talent" displayed by so many of the artists. In Chapter III, Hubert takes up the verbal-visual texts of Arp, Miro, and Ernst, the most startling of which is Ernst's *Paramythes* (1949), with its elaborate dismantling of poetic/artistic convention and cliché. In the graphic assemblage called "The Night of the Last Judgment" (figure 2), for example, the Ascension of Christ is sardonically refigured as a sort of Batman *(Fledermensch)* comic-book page, the "Three Graces" (borrowed from a Canova sculpture) standing in a little huddle in the upper-left corner, even as the Disciples are figures from anatomical drawing books with snail heads and snake coils, and the deity is part bat, part beaver, part Venus rising from the sea, its cloth wings barely attached to human arms. Greek and Christian images clash rather than cohere, and

Figure 2

the accompanying poems (written in both French and German) similarly take the clichés of *Märchen* narrative *(de-ci de-là, hin und her, de temps en temps, dann und wann* to present us with a comic-sinister world of *oberdrachentöter, homme chauve-souris,* and *les jeunes filles déchaînées [qui] se dandinent / clopin-clopant"* (p. 123), text playing off against image to produce a frightening "Last Judgment."

Subsequent chapters take up "The Text as Illustration" (where the visual text is "illustrated" by the poem, as in René Char's poetic response to a set of Ernst collages called *Dent prompte),* Surrealist "illustrations" of nineteenth-century fictions and poems (e.g. Hans Bellmer's etchings for Kleist's *Les Marionettes;* Dali's woodcuts for *Alice in Wonderland,* Man Ray's and Magritte's illustrations of Lautréamont, and André Masson's Rimbaud), and such later proto-Surrealist collaborations as the ideologically charged Aimé Césaire-Wifredo Lam *Cahier d'un retour.* Perhaps the most stimulating chapter is the eighth, "Displacement of Narrative," which takes up the vexing question of Breton's *Nadja.* Unlike other Surrealist books, here the photographs and drawings do seem to illustrate the narrative and to provide reliable documentation; Breton himself suggested that he used photography to eliminate description (p. 257). But from the beginning, the "true-to-life" photographs—say, of La Place du Panthéon—undermine rather than underscore Breton's *récit,* failing as they do to "explain" what happens or even, as in the case of Man Ray's portrait photographs of Eluard and Peret—to provide thematic analogues. On the contrary, "illustration" here functions to displace narrative and render it strange: what, for example, does the statue of Etienne Dolet in the Place Maubert have to do with Breton's *l'amour fou?*

Hubert's discussion of text/image relationships in *Nadja* (Nadja's own occult drawings are particularly significant here) looks ahead to her examination, in the final chapter "Beyond the Book," of Joseph Cornell's boxes where the rift between text and illustration becomes even wider, and where the difference between the raw material and the created art work has been obliterated. "In Cornell's work," says Hubert, "the author has vanished and the text is revamped so that it becomes illustration without being related to iconography and invention" (p. 339). In the collage *Vierge vivace,* for instance, Cornell dismembers Mallarmé's

opening line *(Le vierge, le vivace, et le bel aujourd'hui)*, eliminating its temporal reference and treating Mallarmé's sonnet "as a relic that impelled him to create an imperfect object" (p. 337). It is no longer a case, then, of *word and image* or even of *word-image* (the LACMA title); collage or box now existing in a different space, a space that challenges, as, say, Max Ernst's *Paramythes* did not, the very role and function of artmaking.

From Cornell's box constructions, it is a short step to the words (or images) of the late Belgian artist Marcel Broodthaers (1924–76), a retrospective of whose work was organized in 1989 by the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, in association with the Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels. I was lucky enough to see this show at the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA), where it opened in mid-July. I say lucky enough because Broodthaers is one of the few contemporary artists who genuinely challenges one's thinking as well as one's seeing. As Benjamin Buchloch put it in his introduction to the special Broodthaers issue of *October:*

> With the canny clairvoyance of the materialist, Broodthaers anticipated, as early as the mid-1960s, the complete transformation of artistic production into a branch of the culture industry, a phenomenon we only now recognize. A pessimist of the intellect, he foresaw that the radical institutional critique of his late '60s peers would end in a mere expansion of the field of exclusively spatial, plastic, and aesthetic concerns. He equally distrusted the contestation of the commodity status of the work of art by language and theory alone. (p. 5)

What Buchloch means here, I take it, is that "subversive" art in our time is not just a matter of making statements overtly *critical* of the culture, but by accepting as a given that in our culture everything is commercial, including—and here Broodthaers is especially uncompromising—art and criticism.[4] Unlike, say, Anselm Kiefer, who always presents himself as being *above* and *outside* his corrupt culture, able to comment knowingly on the Holocaust, the Book, the despoiled landscape, Broodthaers makes no pretense to

be anywhere but right in the middle. As he put it in a now notorious statement made on the occasion of his first exhibition at the Galerie Saint-Laurent in Brussels in 1964:

> I, too, wondered if I couldn't sell something and succeed in life. I had for quite a little while been good for nothing. I am forty years old. . . .The idea of inventing something insincere finally crossed my mind and I set to work at once. At the end of three months I showed what I'd done to Ph. Edouard Toussaint, the owner of the Galerie Saint-Laurent. "But this is art," he said, "and I will gladly show it all." If I sell something he'll take thirty percent. These, it seems, are normal conditions; some galleries take seventy-five percent. What is it? In fact, only some objects! (OCT, pp. 71–72)

If art is inevitably "merchandise," a "particular representation of the phenomenon [of reification]," as Broodthaers puts it in an interview (OCT, p. 35), there can be "no direct connection between art and message, especially if the message is political" (OCT, p. 42). Which is to say that "art" is itself the message. Asked whether he "situate[s] himself in a surrealist perspective," Broodthaers responds:

> This one I know by heart: "Everything leads us to believe that there exists a state of mind where life and death, the real and the imaginary, the past and the future, the communicable and the incommunicable, high and low, no longer seem contradictory." I hope I have nothing in common with that state of mind. With *Ceci n'est pas une pipe* Magritte did not take things so lightly. But then again he was too much Magritte. By which I mean that he was too little *Ceci n'est pas une pipe*. It is with that pipe that I tackled the adventure. (1974 Interview; OCT, p. 43)

The quotation is from André Breton, with whom, as with his early mentor Magritte, Broodthaers here parts company. The semantic puzzles of Surrealism, with its peculiar mix of the sexual and the

spiritual, the erotic and the transcendent, belong, he suggests, to the past. For Foucault, who used Magritte's *Ceci n'est pas une pipe* as the point of departure for his first seminal essay on the nature of artistic and verbal representation, the painting posed central questions about the three-way relationship between visual signifier, verbal signifier (the word *pipe)* and the object signified. But suppose the focus is on the pipe's function rather than its status? In Broodthaers' vacuum-formed plastic relief *Livre Tableau* (1969–70) (one of a series called *Poèmes industriels),* the emphasis is on the process of making itself. Vacuum forming, as Michael Compton points out in "In Praise of the Subject" (MB, p. 42), is usually used specifically to make signs that must be easily read. But in Broodthaers' reliefs, the surfaces are painted, each one in two combinations of colors, one the reverse of the other (e.g. the first is black on white, the second white on black) so that they are actually quite difficult to read. Or, as in *Livre Tableau,* the red pipe is first Fig. 4 and then Fig. 7 (and the triangular Fig. 1 is also Fig. 8 and Fig. 2) so that the "chart" cannot be read at all. How then does this "rebus" function? If it doesn't "work" as a signboard, is it an art image? For Magritte's *This is not a Pipe,* Broodthaers substitutes *This is not a work of art.*

Whereas Surrealist "rupture" is always subjected to the process of re-aestheticizing (Ernst's "The Night of the Last Judgment," for example, transgresses the "rules" inherent in representations of the Ascension of Christ only to create an equally aesthetic composition), Broodthaers disavows the avant-garde text itself. In making works out of eggshells and mussels—two of his favorite materials—he avoids structural device (whether the creation of symmetry or a carefully studied asymmetry), arranging the objects in simple rows, piles, or random units. The aim is to use ordinary objects as they relate to human use. A mussel, as Compton points out, "secretes the shell which shapes it. . .and so is perfect, that is authentic. . . .But, paradoxically, there are thousands of other individuals (mussels or humans) just the same as each other" (MB, p. 34). In this sense, *la moule* (mussel) is also *le moule* (mold). "An object," Broodthaers wrote, "is invisible when its form is perfect. — Examples: the egg, the mussel, chips" (see MB, p. 24). Or at least this is true when the object functions in its familiar, expected way. — Remove context and function, and the object becomes other. So

mussels are piled on top of frying pans and casseroles rather than being placed within these receptacles even as eggshells, partly painted lilac, sit on a lilac and white chair or are piled on a table or fill an entire cabinet [figures 3 and 4]. As such, the eggshell begins to take on the aura supposedly denied to reproducible objects:

> All is eggs. The world is an egg. The world is born of the great yolk, the sun. Our mother, the moon, is covered with eggshell. And the belly of a wave is white. A heap

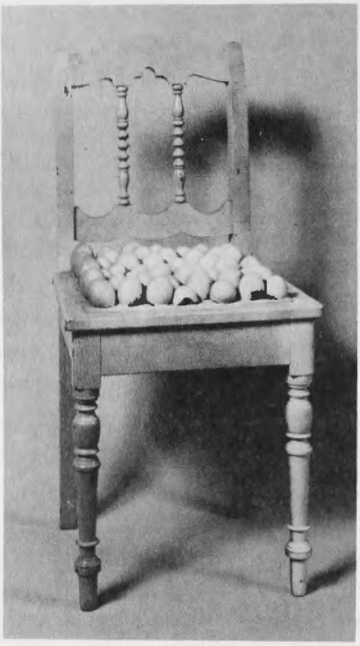

Figure 3

Figure 4

of eggshells, the moon. Dust of eggshells the stars. All dead eggs. (Broodthaers, "Evolution ou l'oeuf film," MB, p. 30)

But what of the book, the repository of word and image? One of Broodthaers' first "art objects" is *Pense-Bête* (1963), made of books, paper, plastic, plastic spheres, and wood [figure 5]. The

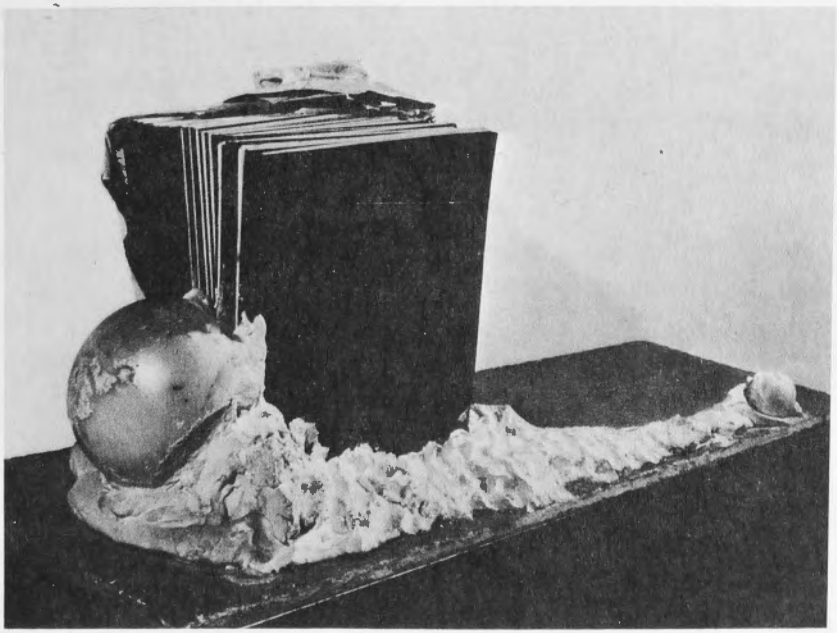

Figure 5

title is a mnemonic device, like a string around your finger; it also suggests the meanings "think animal" or "think stupid" (see Anne Rorimer, OCT, p. 104). Broodthaers' "sculpture" consists, quite simply, of the remaining copies of his book of poems (which sold very poorly!), still bundled together in the original wrapping paper, inserted into a base of plaster that barely covers their lower half, suggesting that the books can be removed and presumably read. The plaster pedestal extends from the book bundle across a wooden base serving as the support for the assemblage; two plastic balls, one at the end of the table, the other at the "book end"

side, are inserted into the soft material so as to hold the books in place. As Broodthaers explains:

> Here you cannot read the book without destroying its sculptural aspect. It is a concrete gesture that passes the prohibition on to the viewer—at least that's what I thought would happen. But I was surprised to find that viewers reacted quite differently from what I had imagined. Everyone so far. . .has perceived the object either as an artistic expression or as a curiosity. "Look! Books in plaster!" No one had any curiosity about the text; nobody had any idea whether this was the final burial of prose or poetry, of sadness or pleasure. ("Ten Thousand Francs Reward," 1974, in OCT, p. 44)

Pense-Bête thus raises basic questions about "art." If you can't sell your book of poems, turn it into something else—and it will sell! But then what is "it"? Whereas Magritte's *Ceci n'est pas une pipe* raises semiotic questions, *Pense-Bête* raises economic and social ones. What is the appeal of a set of books that can't be read, indeed that is wrapped in paper and encased in plaster? Why does the book sell in this form but not in its literal one? What framing turns a remaindered book of poems into a saleable art commodity?

Pense-Bête was only the first of Broodthaers' many experiments with book art, with word and image. In 1970, he began to write notes on a poem that had been one of his favorites ever since his teens, when Magritte had given him a copy: Mallarmé's *Un coup de dés*. In one note, Broodthaers remarks:

> *A throw of dice. This would have been* a treatise on art. The last in date, that of Leonardo da Vinci, has lost some of its consequence, since it accorded too much importance to the plastic arts and, one senses today, to his masters [the Medicis?][5]

A later note remarks: "the thought of Mallarmé ends in two tracks—1, Space—2, Image joined in a single mind" (OCT, p. 112). The result of these speculations is Broodthaers' book *Un coup de*

dés jamais n'abolira le hasard. Image (1969). In this thirty-two page text, *word* has literally become *image:* the irregular typography and layout is translated into purely visual terms, the text on each page being rendered as a series of solid, horizontal, black linear rectangles [figure 6]. These solid bars are exactly proportioned to the size and scale of the printed words and placed in the same relationship on the page. Meanwhile, Mallarmé's text itself reappears in mirror image as Broodthaers' "Preface."

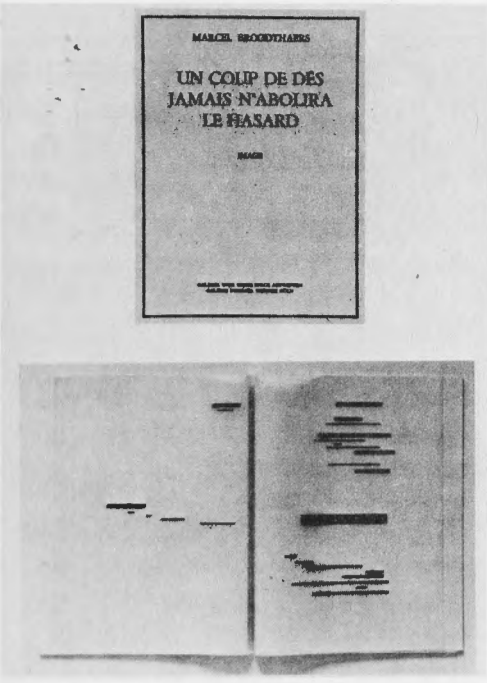

Figure 6

At one level, *Un coup de dés. . . Image* may be said to function intertextually, the layout of linear rectangles providing a useful diagram of the poem's actual prosodic structure. But the work also carries to its logical extreme the hermeticism for which *Un coup de dés* is famous: the book, no longer to be "read," has become pure image. The object is thus withdrawn from its habitual system of communication; the famous Mallarmean "silence" is achieved.

It is also ironic that the "book," as Broodthaers reinvents it, no longer participates in what Renée Hubert calls, with reference to Surrealist book art, the "antimimetic pursuit" (p. 343). Its pages contain neither fanciful erotic image nor complex verbal pun, neither composite visual form nor suggestive sound play. Rather, its simple black and gray rectangles, etched against the white page, imitate and, so to speak, illustrate the trajectory of the throw of dice of the title. What you see is what you see.

The Broodthaers exhibition thus forces us to go back to such basic questions as what is the alphabet? the word? the phrase? the

poem? These are the questions more recently posed by such book artists as Johanna Drucker, whose *The Word Made Flesh* has just been published. The frontispiece bears the title:

A L'INTERIEUR D LANGU

and Drucker goes right to the heart of the matter. Each page features one giant black letter, elegantly rendered, the book spelling out, page by page, its title, *The Word Made Flesh.* The small "I" of the first page, stands on the second page, next to the T of "The," about 30 times its size, so as to spell out "iT. By the sixth unnumbered page [figure 7], the big T is shared by two words—" [T]he

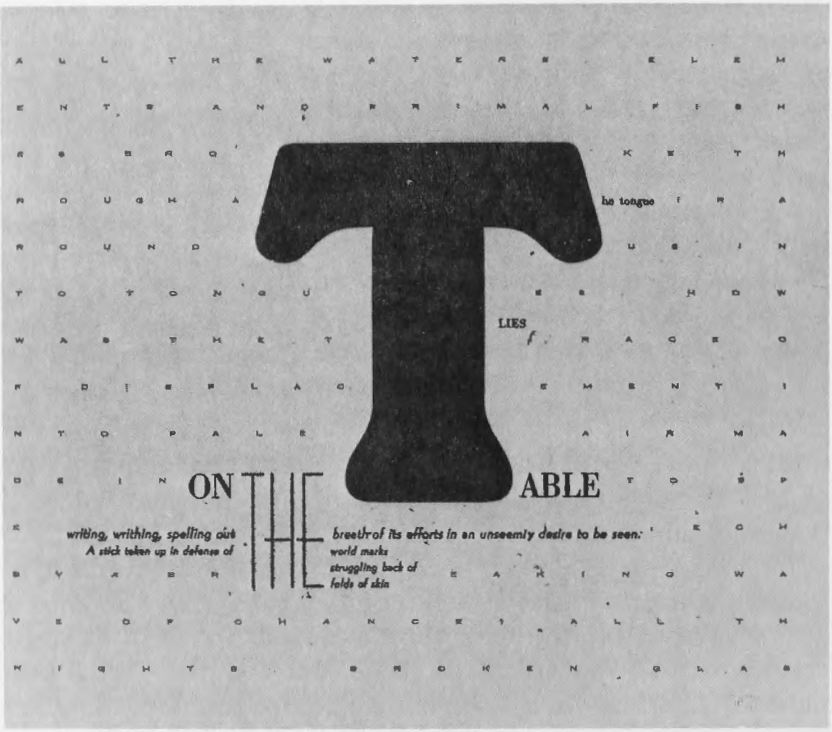
his tongue
LIES
ON THE ABLE
writing, writhing, spelling out
A stick taken up in defense of
breath of its efforts in an unseemly desire to be seen.
world marks
struggling back of
folds of skin

Figure 7

tongue, "ON THE [TABLE]— and the black letters, of different size and type font, spell out the following description, the word "the" in elegant inch-high letters having to modify five different nouns:

> The tongue lies on the table writing, writhing spelling out the breath of its efforts in an unseemingly desire to be seen. A stick taken up in defense of the world marks the struggling back of the folds of skin.

This black verbal composition is etched against a background of red letters, spaced so that word boundaries are usually ignored. If the reader "corrects" the spacing, we have the following:

> All the waters, elements and primal fishes broke through air around us into tongues. How was the trace of displacement into pale air made into speech by a breaking wave of chance? All th[e] nights, broken glas[s]

and the text continues onto the next page: "[s] and starstruck children woke to find themselves enslaved by authoritarian structures. . . ."

As the text evolves, the black foreground lettering becomes more and more elaborate, the word literally being made "flesh," as the huge replicas of T, H, E, W, O, R, D, M, A, D, E, F, L, E, S, H are described as "naked," "wheezing," "lie[ing] back," "feeling," "glowing," "speaking," "throbbing," and so on. The "black text" is related to muscle, skin, wheezing, articulation, and especially to "MATTER," even as the red background text is given to abstraction and elaboration, as on pages 8 and 9 (the E and W pages):

> The sting of power marked the world into small spaces of unorthodox arrangement, vivid scarlet as the fact of blood against the winter wash, then all the earth unfocused energy and wandering eyes made their way into the pulse of a primitive economy and waited there for the ice to crack on our surface of time. . .

Notice that here words become members of phrasal groups but the phrasal groups don't quite follow or add up. The passage is vaguely "poetic" ("vivid scarlet as the fact of blood against the winter wash," "the ice to crack on our surface of time,") but poetry is only a dim memory here and besides the spacing of the letters makes it extremely difficult to "read" the words properly.

On the one hand, then, the word is made flesh right before our eyes, as the big black block letters participate in elaborate "skin games." On the other, words are unmade as letters sink back into the larger gene pool of the alphabet. On the final page, the giant H is part of "toucH," "notHing," "breatH," "Handshake," and "fligHt"—its incarnation measured against the textuality of

> signs of monumentality. Suggestions and reconditioned bodies manifest themselves long enough to be recognized according to the delicately nuanced pace of articulation of a raw and passionate tongue.

Here the "articulation" of the "raw and passionate tongue" is finally given *breath* and *touch*. The word, indeed the letter, assumes life and takes flight.

It is interesting to compare any given page of Johanna Drucker's book to the LACMA advertising copy with which I began. In both cases, we have an elaborate page design, where certain words stand out. In the ad, the initial "THE" is presented in pseudo-medieval script with a lot of flourishes and arabesques and introduces "GREATEST ART PATRONS SINCE LORENZO DE MEDICI." In *The Word Made Flesh, the* is never intact, the "H" becoming part of "this," "his," "thing," "with," and so on. As such, Drucker's *t-h-e* cannot participate in "corporate expression."

Analogously, the museum shifts ground. On 27 September 1968, Broodthaers opened his own museum on the ground floor of his house on the rue de la Pépinière in Brussels; this *Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles, Section XIXième Siècle* consisted, so Michael Compton tells us, "of packing cases in which works of art had once traveled, postcards of pictures belonging to other museums, some slides being projected, and an empty motionless transport truck" (MB, p. 46). The *Musée d'Art Moderne* had an "official opening," including a letter of announcement, an engraved invitation, a *buffet froid*, and an inaugural address (see MB, p. 78). But this museum featured no collaboration between poet and painter, no reciprocity between Word and Image, not even, for that matter, a Dada or Surrealist "word-image." And there was also no corporate sponsor.

Notes

1. Kiki (Alice Prin), *Memoirs,* trans. from the French by Samuel Putnam. Intro. by Ernest Hemingway (Paris: Edward W. Titus at the Sign of the Black Manikin Press, 1930), p. 138.
2. See Yoshiaki Shimizu (ed.), *Japan: The Shaping of Daimyo Culture 1185–1868* (New York: George Braziller, Inc. and Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1988), p. 110.
3. Tristan Tzara, "Dada Manifesto on Feeble Love and Bitter Love," in Tzara, *Seven Manifestos and Lampisteries,* trans. Barbra Wright, illustrations by Francis Picabia (New York: Riverrun Press, 1981), p. 31.
4. See the dedication to *Art Actuel* (Brussels: Galerie MTL, 1970), reproduced in *Marcel Broodthaers,* subsequently cited as MB.
5. The translation is Ann Rorimer's: see "The Exhibition at the MTL Gallery in Brussels," March 13–April 10, 1970, OCT, p. 111.

Figures

1. Askikaga Takauji, *Wakagaishi.* Hanging scroll, ink on decorated paper. 31.2 x 52.0 cm. Nanbokucho period, 1344. Sekai Kyuseikyo (MOA Art Museum), Sizuoka Prefecture, Japan.
2. Max Ernst, Collage, *The Night of the Last Judgment,* from *Paramythes* (Paris: Le Point Cardinal, 1967).
3. Marcel Broodthaers, *Chaise lilas avec oeufs,* 1966. Chair, eggshells, paint. 90 x 43 x 45 cm. Private collection.
4. Marcel Broodthaers, *Grande casserole de moules,* 1966. Casserole, mussel shells, paint. 65 x 75 x 70 cm. Collection De Decker-Lohaus.
5. Marcel Broodthaers, *Pense-Bête,* 1963. Books, paper, plaster, plastic spheres, wood. 98 x 84 x 43 cm. Collection Anne-Marie and Stephane Rona.
6. Marcel Broodthaers, *Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard. Image.* Antwerp, Wide White Space Gallery; Cologne, Galerie Michael Werner, 1969. 32.5 x 25 cm., 32 pp.
7. Johanna Drucker, unnumbered page from *The Word Made Flesh* (Cambridge, MA: Bow & Arrow Press, 1989).

ELIOT WEINBERGER

THE LIVES OF SOME POETS

As the decade begins, these are some of the poets currently in prison in various parts of the world:

Jack Mapanje, 45, of Malawi, is the poet best known in the West. A book of his poems, *Of Chameleons and Gods,* and two anthologies, *Oral Poetry from Africa* and *Summer Fires: New Poetry of Africa,* are available in Britain. Mapanje was arrested in September 1987 and has been held incommunicado ever since. He has never been formally charged with any crime, nor has the government given any explanation for his arrest. Malawi, formerly Nyasaland, is a one-party state ruled by Life President Hastings Banda, now in his 90s. Recently celebrated by Paul Theroux in the *National Geographic* as an island of tranquility in a chaotic continent, Malawi has one of the strictest censorship boards in the world, and even has a dress code for its citizens. Mapanje is neither politically active nor associated with any opposition group; his poetry, however, deals with social realities apparently distasteful to President Banda.

Nguyen Chi Thien, 56, of Vietnam, has spent 27 of the last 29 years in prison. The last time he was free, in early 1979, he wrote out 400 poems he had composed mentally in prison, ran into the British embassy in Hanoi, handed his manuscript to a staff member, and was arrested as he left the building. He has remained in prison since. His manuscript, *Flowers from Hell,* has been published in a bilingual edition by Yale Southeast Asia Studies. He is considered to be one of the best Vietnamese poets of the century.

Chen Ming Yuan, 48. Arrested while a hospital patient a few days after the Tiananmen Square massacre on June 4, 1989. Status unknown.

Ye Wenfu. Arrested in June for signing a petition by the Beijing Union of Intellectuals calling for government acceptance of

student demands. Tortured after refusing to appear on television to state that the massacre never occurred.

Mang Ke, 39. One of the best known of the "Obscure Poets" of the 1970s, and founder with Bei Dao of the seminal journal *Today*. Arrested in June; status unknown.

(Twenty other writers, including leading novelists, journalists and editors, are currently known to be under arrest in China. It is presumed that there are many others.)

Al-Mutawakel Taha, 31. Head of the Palestinian Writers' Union. Spent six months in prison in 1988, then was re-arrested in February 1989. (Twenty-six other Palestinian writers are known to be currently in prison or under house arrest in the Occupied Territories.)

Khamphan Pradith of Laos. In labor camps since 1975. Has not seen his wife or children in thirteen years.

Sa'ad El Sawi Mahmoud and **Muhammad Muhammad El Faqih Salih,** two Libyan poets among eighteen arrested in 1978 for holding a meeting to commemorate the death of the Libyan poet Ali Ragi'iy. All were sentenced to life imprisonment.

Two Moroccan poets: **Ali Idrissi Kaitouni,** arrested in 1982 immediately after the publication of a book of his poems, tortured and sentenced to fifteen years; **Mohammad Srisi,** 37, in prison since 1974.

Dozens of writers in South Africa are under various forms of detention, including prison, house arrest and town arrest, or are facing charges. Their situations change so rapidly that it is difficult to say what the current status is for many of them. The poet **Mzwake M'Buli,** under arrest for much of 1988 and 1989, is out on bail facing charges of possession of explosives. His house was attacked in August 1989, but his family managed to escape. A record of his poems read to music, *Change is Pain,* is available in the U.S.

Some twenty writers are known to be in prison in South Korea. Last year many of them went on a prolonged hunger strike for the right to have pencils and paper in their cells. Among the poets are **Im Hyung-chin; Lee Soong-chul; Koh Eun,** chairman of the Writers' Association for National Literature; and **Moon Ik-hwan,** 71, a well-known poet and Christian minister, who has been in and out of prison since 1976.

Tadrus Trad, 43, of Syria. Arrested and held without trial since 1980.

Scores of writers are imprisoned in Turkey which, after Israel, is the second largest recipient of U.S. foreign aid. The poets include: **Mehmet Cetin,** 34, in prison since 1981 and repeatedly tortured; **Ersin Ergun Keles,** 29, in prison since 1981, originally sentenced to death but now facing life imprisonment, hospitalized on at least two occasions because of severe beatings; **Orhan Selen,** 36, arrested in 1985; and **Mecit Unal,** arrested in 1980. Six writers and editors associated with a Kurdish magazine *Ozgur Gelecek* ("A Future in Freedom") have been in and out of prison for the last ten years. Three of them were arrested in 1989 after the magazine published an article celebrating what would have been the 87th birthday of Nazim Hikmet, the great Turkish poet.

(Due to the rapid changes in the U.S.S.R. and Eastern Europe, poets known to be in prison in 1989 in those countries have not been included.)

For more information, write the PEN Freedom to Write Committee, PEN American Center, 568 Broadway, New York, NY 10012. (Special thanks to Andrea Gambino for supplying the piles of reports from which this brief compilation was taken.)

In a related case, a genius of American music, **James Brown,** is currently serving a 15-year sentence in Georgia on highly dubious charges of resisting arrest and assaulting an officer. Brown may well be the single most influential figure in black popular music of the last thirty years. (He has been, of course, one of the few to stay alive.) If you haven't heard him in years, listen and be amazed.

DONALD REVELL

THREE POEMS

Heat Lightning

for Ralph Angel

The wind lets no leaf touch the ground.
Next door, in bright sun, a girl on stilts
is so fabulously illuminated
she blends into the light below her legs.
We are living in the beautiful district.
We are a people without holidays.

On the old street, men would kill their wives
for a stiff wind. Their freedom was laws,
and their lives stank. No one is healthy
where discarded children return cureless
and the wind's telegraphy on flagpoles
(colonial savage other) speaks
the fates of animals, the edicts of holiday.

Concede a limb to save a limb, an eye
for an eye that looks outward only.
My heart was the sieve of law and had
no reward but my next child's slower illness
on the ward where they made Christmas in July
and every month. The stockings never came down.

On the old street, sacrifice depended
upon faith. In the beautiful district,
light stands firm beneath the children,
I live alone, undiscarded, and
sacrifice is the ordinary of each day.

Sun and wind intensify
without interruption and we blend
to one color the color of windows.

Epigone

The idol of the moment is for all time.
I love the unresilience of it,
inexpressive nudity of seawater
painted onto a car's windshield,
improvised when there was nothing to know.

You may kill the spider, but spare the web.
My son feeds at the breast like that.
His face grows smaller as his body grows.
At his level, the wind has an ant's legs,
and there is nothing to know except
the anatomies of wind changing,
acquiring flesh oh at all levels.

I depend upon the idol of the moment
as upon the unsustained, saving grace
of the night school, the yellow instructors
weeping unashamedly when none else
is moved at all. I hear the sounds
anatomized in the wind's sound,
sustained in my son's voice.

Faith is improvisation. It marks
the sky with a double helix of airplanes,
our better humanity, and fills
the interstices with a child
as the rain falls and the wind stutters
away into the shadows at an ant's pace.

Everything irreparable deserve worship,
least gesture of the wind, music.

On The Cards

Upstairs is warmer but is not the future.
Somewhere else, in a cage, the winter nations
of circus-men and half-men and refugees
are interrogated out of existence.
Upstairs, the family makes music.
But in the future's idiot containment,
questions turn to ice, and the first snow
of many deaths turns black before it falls.

Someone stirs it up inside me.
Native of the capital city,
musician's bastard daughter, tour-guide,
she is new perfectness, and I am her creature.
Having been happy for so long
in a cage, she used up all her sex
in that cage, confessional she now
recites as we drive past the monuments.

Families make music for circuses.
Time puts an end to circuses.
In animal sentences, loveliest
time that I shall ever know, the future
increases, recites, recovers
tear-jerking horizontal landscapes
in black ice and the mercy to love
a father's vanity and not the father,
a mother's bitterness and not the mother.
Orphancy of the confessional
acquits black earth and cradle, what I was waiting for.

A LITTLE BACKGROUND: THE SISTERS

Both girls disliked this choosing
warmth

to welcome
each other's manageable oiled silks,

each other's deep water mindfulness,
each semi-

transparent
spread of young espionage.

To one, the mother lay harsher
and larger.

To one,
beneath the brother's husky light

cruel traps of film, wire and color
did elide.

I think I know
(to each she thought) of any woman

lengthened and coiled and
curled.

We are
opaque and cannot know our skin.

We must depend on our gleaming
and bathing,

suddenly complete.
Both girls disliked this equal

sensing of disproportionate
loss,

the tragic
borders of surface and appearance's

blue trap.
This was pain, one said.

I did not grow out of it, and then
I did,

when
the siren pierced me. When

a person bumped the car I
came awake

flaking
scales and fin. I take back

my raised lens. Open. Shut.
Do shed

habit's
childhood, do not tear my hair out

at the bleached roots, do not
pull

the trigger
from a plane above town.

I was my own claustrophobia,
climbing

down.
By my brushed plaits,

you may have known me. Once.
Once could.

MICHAEL PALMER

ON OBJECTIVISM

First, allow me to thank the Fondation Royaumont and all of those responsible, such as Rémy Hourcade, Emmanuel Hocquard and Francis Maréchal for their generosity in organizing and inviting us to this gathering. The profound thanks of all of us extend as well to Judith Crews for her kindness and invaluable assistance.

In one of those periodic moments of cultural reaction which seem to plague the United States, it is particularly meaningful to have the opportunity to discuss a group of poets such as the Objectivists, who have helped us to understand the poetic values of resistance, social awareness and exploratory integrity.

Finally, I would like to offer this introduction in memory of our friends Claude Richard and Leah Rakosi, whom we had hoped could be among us today.

(Tape of "A"-11, read by Zukofsky)

I would like to begin with the music, the work as heard, since it is that which in the winter of 1963 provided my introduction to the Objectivists (that and the publication by New Directions in 1962 of *The Materials* and *By the Waters of Manhattan).* Specifically, a tape recording of "A"-11 and a section of "A"-12, Zukofsky's voice devoid of theatrics, tracking with great care the syntactical and metrical complexity. "A"-11: the prosodic grid drawn from Guido Cavalcanti's *ballata,* "Perch'io non spero" (the same *ballata* echoed to different effect twenty years before, at the start of Eliot's "Ash Wednesday"); Zukofsky's, a poem of forty-six lines, one stanza of six, four of ten, with complex end and internal rhymes, each stanza terminating in the word "honor." He threads together

Talk delivered as introduction to the Objectivist Conference at the Fondation Royaumont in Asnières-sur-Oise, September 29th–October 1st, 1989.

the "notes" or words of Guido, of "Spin" or "the blest" (his Spinoza—Baruch or Blessed-lens-grinder and philosopher of the *Ethics),* the healer and metaphysician Paracelsus, Joseph Rodman Drake (author of the poem *Bronx* (the river in New York named for the forebears of the poet William Bronk)), Henry James and the makers of two books of the Pentateuch, Numbers and Exodus. (Undoubtedly I've missed a few.) It is a song which invokes song as an act of devotion to wife Celia and violinist-son Paul, and as a projected consolation for them after the poet's death. "To live . . .our desires lead us to honor." *(Ethics,* 4.52n) "A"-11 was composed in 1950–51, the first new movement of "A" since 1940, and one can read it as well, I think, as an act of mourning for the century. Marx is now if not missing, at least more faintly heard (he will not appear in *Bottom),* but Bach will return with the long movement, "A"-12, "done in a summer" the poems says, "June-October" reads the manuscript. Its question, "Where stemmed the Jew among strangers" would be asked in various ways by others among the poets we are discussing on this weekend of Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year.

I understood little of either text at first and would not have my own copy to puzzle over until the Jonathan Cape edition of "A" 1–12 appeared in 1966. To those of us listening, though, two things were apparent: that there had been no equivalent model of syntactical music in American Modernism; and that it was manifestly (for all of its "difference") a product of American Modernism—the presence of Guido marked instruction from Pound, the density of reference pointed to both Pound and Eliot, while the "open" syntax, the resistance to "meaning" (to "meaning" as a given), pointed to the exploratory and heterogeneous counter-tradition in American writing dating back at least to Whitman and Dickinson. Equally the two texts were drawn from the paratactic structure of a "poem of a life," like (and unlike) *Leaves of Grass* and *The Cantos,* like (and unlike) *Paterson* and *The Maximus Poems.*

"Upper limit music," as Zukofsky had written of his poetics, and "A"-11 seemed very close to that limit where the harmonic density at once intensifies and threatens the signifying capacity of words. Certainly the passive reader will make nothing of it; it demands a virtually hermeneutical engagement with its words,

playing insistently on shades of meaning within each. As Michael Davidson has remarked, it is hermetic in a way even our most difficult poets, such as Pound, never are. Among other things, it is this resistance which sets Zukofsky apart from—and at times in contention with—the other poets known as Objectivists.

In the summer of 1963, at the Vancouver Poetry Conference, Robert Creeley had asked whether I was familiar with Zukofsky's work. I answered that I'd read a very few things in the little magazines, but that they had not made an impression. He sent the tape that winter. On it were also recordings of H.D. reading from *Helen in Egypt,* Levertov, Ed Dorn reading very early, very lucid work from the book, *Hands Up!,* and Allen Ginsberg reading *Howl* at Stan Brakhage's cabin in Colorado with the sounds of the "underground" filmmaker's children in the background. Creeley had discovered Zukofsky through Robert Duncan in 1955. Duncan, by his testimony, had been reading him, whenever he could find the work, since 1937. (I do not at all intend by this perhaps ill-advised anecdotalism to try to construct some specious patriarchal lineage or filiation, but rather to give a sense of the tenuous threads of an "outside" literary community that existed, and the difficulty of discovering, of finding and finding out about poets for the most part ignored and in some instances systematically excluded by the cultural arbiters of both the Left (for example, the Trotskyite *Partisan Review* and the Stalinist *New Masses)* and the Right. The epigones and heirs to the Eliot of *The Sacred Wood* and "Tradition and the Individual Talent," and to Frost and Auden, such as the New Critics, the Fugitives and the Agrarians, constructed a new Anglo-American formalist ideology in reaction to what was perceived as the excesses of modernist experimentation. The work privileged conventional (mainly British) forms, a reified subject, consistency of tone, elaborate tropes, socially coded irony, myth, and Eliot's central metaphoric device, the objective correlative. The shared ideologies, both overt and hidden, of such a poetics served in effect to buttress the cultural institutions whose patronage was essential to such poets' ambition. Their most conspicuous, if troubled, heirs in the post-war period were the so-called Confessional Poets (partly centered in Cambridge, Massachusetts, where the above-mentioned tape arrived and was played about the time Robert Lowell was preparing the manuscript of *For the*

Union Dead for publication.) Here are two stanzas from the poem "Middle Age" in that volume:

> Now the midwinter grind
> is on me, New York
> drills through my nerves
> as I walk
> the chewed-up streets.
>
> At forty-five
> what next, what next?
> At every corner
> I meet my Father,
> my age, still alive.

I would doubt the need for comment on such mawkish posturing and exhausted rhetoric, except that it quickly became a model for the drama of the "petit moi" among campus poets and anthologizers across America. In fact, one or another version of a debased romantic style has constituted acceptable poetic affect ever since the official recuperation of the Romantics from the social and cultural challenge they initially hoped to embody. Even when turned supposedly outward toward the world, such a "voice" tends to flounder in a veiled, mandarin paternalism. Lowell, Berryman, Plath, the early Adrienne Rich and Roethke, among others, would foreground personal, psychological narrative, reflecting both the constitution and the crisis of the subject in a post-war America preoccupied with individualism ("Yankee individualism") and self-realization. The popular acceptance among many intellectuals of neo-Freudian ego psychology would further reinforce this myth, or more precisely melodrama, of the self.

The tenets and refusals of the Objectivists (articulated in their lives as well as their work) stand in contrast both to this form of public self-dramatization (there were other forms as well, among the Beats for example),* and to that other subjectivism of Ezra

*The Bohemian showmanship of the Beats would prove a very effective marketing device, appealing as it did (however unintentionally) to stereotypes of artistic rebellion and production already at least partly ensconced in the popular imagination. Henry Luce could afford to "recognize" Ginsberg's carnivalesque individualism, while at the same time anointing James Dickey as Time-Life's jingoistic house versifier.

Pound, represented by the virtual compulsion to reduce and subordinate various fields of information to an emotionally distorted cultural agenda. (The complex relation of Pound to the Objectivist poets, particularly Reznikoff, Zukofsky and Oppen, will I'm sure be raised during this symposium. Let us say for now that, at the very least, it raises another question, that of the many contradictions at the heart of the Modernist project (if we can in fact speak of a "project").) This second question, among other things, includes within it the relation of the aesthetic to the political. Any comprehensive discussion of the Objectivists must address the significance of their progressive social values, as well as the difficulty, in the pre- and post-war years, of integrating those values with the demands of an art and the ideological pressures of a culture. What is obvious is that there is an active social dimension to the work of these poets which deserves scrutiny.

Within the fractured narrative of modernism, we can probably say that Objectivism begins with the perceived necessity to add active intellect to the verbal and visual economy of imagistic method. In its brief history, Imagism had quickly degenerated into a passive and decorative form, evoking exactly that hothouse atmosphere of the nineties it was meant to dispel. Yet at its origins it had served the purpose of clearing away much of the rhetoric and poetic furniture inherited from the Victorian period. The refusal of such a rhetoric might be characterized as the first of a series of critical negations by the Objectivists. Throughout his "Day Book," Rakosi repeatedly warns against the dangers of posturing and verbal contrivance and against the "large Romantic tone of greatness." If he is arguing for a "plain style," after Williams, grounded in the rhythms and accents of American speech, this must not be confused with the self-consciously dryly literary "middle style" of so much polite and nondescript American verse. And if, characteristically, he speaks of himself as poet as an "amanuensis of time," it does not mean that his ambitions for the poem are of equivalent modesty. Rather it is a warning against foregrounding personality, whether through avant-garde gesturalism or other styles of self-representation. The work faces the world.

"Rays of an object brought to a focus," states Zukofsky. Proposing "sincerity" and "rested totality" as values, Zukofsky too proposes an ethics of representation "concomitant" (Veblen's

word) with desire. Presentation without superfluous commentary. Form resides in the act of (or in an active) objectification. This term, so slippery in its uses and shadings, must not be confused with either scientific or moral objectivism. It is closer instead to a notion of integrity, in the sense of wholeness, retaining faith, as Oppen would say, in the possibility of reference even when faced with the unspeakable and apparently unrepresentable events of our century. I am reminded, somewhat paradoxically, of the novelist Christa Wolf's term, "subjective authenticity." In conversation with Joachim Walther she explains that "This mode of writing is not 'subjectivist,' but 'interventionist.' It does require subjectivity, and a subject who is prepared to undergo unrelenting exposure. . .to the material at hand. . .The new reality you see is different from the one you saw before. . .It becomes more and more difficult to say 'I,' and yet at the same time often imperative to do so." Later in the same conversation she adds, "When I say 'authenticity,' I don't mean 'truthfulness'; I'm not moralizing. Truthfulness must be taken for granted; it is absolutely undeniable that literature cannot exist without it." Now a remarkably parallel passage from George Oppen's essay, "The Mind's Own Place":

> It is possible to find a metaphor for anything, an analogue: but the image is encountered, not found; it is an account of the poet's perception, of the act of perception; it is a test of sincerity, a test of conviction, the rare poetic quality of truthfulness. They meant to replace by the data of experience the accepted poetry of their time, a display by the poets of right thinking and right sentiment, a dreary waste of lies. That data was and is the core of what "modernism" restored to poetry, the sense of the poet's self among things. So much depends upon the red wheelbarrow. The distinction between a poem that shows confidence in itself and in its materials, and on the other hand a performance, a speech by the poet, is the distinction between poetry and histrionics. It is a part of the function of poetry to serve as a test of truth. It is possible to say anything in abstract prose, but a great many things one believes or would like to believe or thinks he believes will not substantiate themselves in the concrete materials of the

poem. It is not to say that a poet is immune to the "real" world to say that he is not likely to find the moment, the image, in which a political generalization or any other generalization will prove its truth. Denise Levertov begins a fine poem with the words: "The authentic!" and goes on to define

> the real, the new-laid,
> egg whose speckled shell
> the poet fondles and must break
> if he will be nourished

By speaking against literary contrivance, Oppen argues both for the possibility, or necessity, of an immediacy of poetic engagement or intervention, and against the "poetic," that is, against the devices of a passive and acculturated representation. He argues as well for a gaze turned outward, a responsibility of the self to find its realization, its form as thinking subject, in its relation to the visible and invisible things of the world. The understanding that such a realization is at best problematic is part of what informs the silences and ellipses of his lines with their particular resonance, or perhaps I mean content:

> So spoke of the existence of things
> An unmanageable pantheon
>
> Absolute, but they say
> Arid.
>
> A city of the corporations
>
> Glassed
> In dreams
>
> And images—
>
> And the pure joy
> Of the mineral fact

Tho it is impenetrable

As the world, if it is matter,
Is impenetrable.

("Of Being Numerous" #2)

Another music, as determined as Zukofsky's to excise unnecessary notes. As in Zukofsky, as Michael Heller has noted, the concern here is not with "the reified objectification of knowledge into a science. . .but with an objectification of human instance, of witnessing." Conscious too that bearing witness is at once necessary and, in any final sense, impossible. The form here is that of the possibility of knowing, but not of a knowing, and least of all the known—hence, perhaps, desire. (Oppen's Heidegger must for the moment remain in brackets, as for example his references to the 1929 University of Freiburg speech and his later use of other texts. For his ontological ground, the poet of radical commitment turns to that "thinking toward being" of the right-wing philosopher, even as the philosopher would turn to Hölderlin and other poets for much of the discursive ground of his later work. Can we cite this too as one of the endless "contradictions" which seem more and more to be not only common but constituent features of modernism? Celan and Heidegger, particularly here and on this day, come to mind, but equally Zukofsky and Pound, Cardenal and Pound and any number of others. Shifting temporal perspective, we might eventually also ask whether it is not from contradiction that all poetry must attempt to speak.)

Returning to the question of "witness," is it this double acknowledgement, of necessity and impossibility, which leads Reznikoff to construct *Testimony* and *Holocaust* by a process of selection and editing and to remain determinedly silent himself? Rakosi speaks of poet as amanuensis; discussing negation in Melville's "Bartleby," Blanchot writes, "In 'Bartleby,' the enigma comes from 'pure' writing, which can only be that of a copyist (re-writing). . .Language, perpetuating itself, keeps still." The subject disappears in the name of the subject, and a lexicon of silence is asked to speak. From Reznikoff's *Autobiography: New York:*

I am afraid
because of the foolishness
I have spoken.
I must diet
on silence;
strengthen myself
with quiet

The great majority of Reznikoff's Manhattan poems do not offer even this glimpse of the first person. They detail, with clarity and (a perhaps deceptive) simplicity, the urban landscape, often that of the poor and the dispossessed. Material once thought unseemly—unpoetic—like a cracked marble wash-stand or a red wheelbarrow. They are far from the genteel mainstream of American poetry of the time, as well as from the much later narrative of Lowell's New York (or more accurately, Lowell in New York). Yet in a sense they are, on the surface, also distant from that fragment of "A"-12 I first mentioned, where Zukofsky recounts his father's voyage from Russia, his life as a "presser" amid the immigrants of the Lower East Side, a Jew who keeps Sabbath. Sight and directness of presentation have a priority in Reznikoff and Rakosi which cannot be claimed for Zukofsky's poetics, struggling to conjoin sight (I's pronounced eyes), with that upper limit of music, at some near absolute pitch of definition. Each of the poets, in interviews, has recognized a point at which, after the shared sources and sympathies and shared refusals have been noted, the distinctions or differences must be acknowledged. At that point it might be said that the "subject" of the Objectivists will disappear behind the work. If this is ironic, I hope it is an irony that will be appreciated by Carl Rakosi, who is the most determined practitioner of the ironic mode within this group.

On the announcement for this conference, four Objectivists are listed. To end this introduction, I would like to add a fifth, Lorine Niedecker, as yet I gather unknown in France, with only a few poems translated—hardly a surprise, since she is still all but unknown in the United States (thereby carrying on another Objectivist tradition). Until recently her work was effectively unobtainable, but there are now two collections of poetry in print and a selection of correspondence with Cid Corman whose role, along

with that of Jonathan Williams and James Laughlin, in publishing the Objectivists deserves our recognition and gratitude. A study of Niedecker's life and work by the Canadian scholar Jenny Penberthy is also due soon for publication. Niedecker lived most of her life in rural Wisconsin, often on the edge of poverty. A life-long friend and correspondent of Zukofsky, she first found the work of the Objectivists in the 1931 issue of *Poetry* magazine. Niedecker fuses the Objectivist visual focus, political skepticism and lyricism with the isolate and resistant awareness of Emily Dickinson. Such a joining reveals a current of critical and analytic lyricism running from the origins of American modernism to the present. It is a poetry of extreme concentration and reticence, alert to the minute signs of the natural world and to the costs of time and isolation. I'll end by reading a few of her poems. They represent as clearly as any of the work under discussion the reasons a certain number, from the impossible community of poets, found among these barely visible writers a crucial "missing link" in the evolution of exploratory modernist practice, that restored a sense of humane and socially progressive thought to a narrative too often tragically lacking in it. I'll read from the selection edited by Cid Corman and titled *The Granite Pail.*

(Reads "Traces of Living Things," "My Life by Water," and selected passages from "Paean to Place")

MICHAEL DAVIDSON

FORMS OF REFUSAL: GEORGE OPPEN'S "DISTANT LIFE"

I first read George Oppen's poetry while a graduate student in Buffalo, New York. I was especially fond of "Some San Francisco Poems" which, in the middle of Buffalo's brutal winters, returned me to a more benign landscape:

> The sea and a crescent strip of beach
> Show between the service station and a deserted shack
>
> A creek drains thru the beach
> Forming a ditch
> There is a discarded super-market cart in the ditch
> That beach is the edge of a nation
>
> There is something like shouting along the highway
> A California shouting
> On the long fast highway over the California
> mountains
>
> Point Pedro
> Its distant life[1]

Having spent a great deal of time at Pedro Point in high school and college, I was moved by Oppen's unadorned presentation of the place, including the supermarket cart stuck in the creek bed. Later, upon meeting Oppen in San Francisco, I told him how much this poem had meant to me, and he explained that he and

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This talk was given at the conference, "Poètes Objectivistes Américains," held at the Centre Littéraire de Royaumont in France, Sept. 29–Oct. 1, 1989. Appearing on the George Oppen panel, besides myself, were David Bromige, Yves DiManno (the principal translator of Oppen in France) and, serving as translator, Pierre Alféri.

Mary used to take the bus to Pedro Point as one of their forays out of the city on public transportation. "It was simply where the bus stopped," he explained; "we'd just get out and walk around."

This anecdote reminds me that Oppen's more metaphysical concerns are often the result of material conditions—the exigencies of travel, work, and human intercourse—and that the "little words" he loves so much are attached to a world as immediately encountered as a bus stop.[2] We could extend this anecdote further by showing how it illustrates a paradox at the heart of modernism, one between value and contingency: "distant life" refers to a world beyond words and therefore inaccessible, but it also means a world encountered, if at all, *in* words and therefore invisible. For writers like Pound and Joyce the paradox was solved by containing contingency in repetition, amassing cultural fragments towards an eternal dynastic edifice. Oppen chose to solve this problem not by adding more fragments to an already debased architecture but by refusing culture altogether. We could see his gesture both as a refusal to speak in the face of political pressure, whether from the Zhdanovian censors or the McCarthy committee, and refusal of the metaphysical lure of totality.[3]

The context of refusal in American literature has a rich and varied history, beginning with Puritanism and its fears of Antinomian rebellion. Poets from Edward Taylor and Anne Bradstreet through Emily Dickinson, Robert Creeley and Susan Howe have all been skeptical of the full, adequate word, preferring to "tell all the Truth but tell it slant," as Emily Dickinson said. We could see George Oppen's poetics as emerging within this tradition, and we could identify three frames within which his refusal is embodied: the social, the epistemological, and the textual. As frames, these categories are by no means discrete but overlap and interpenetrate each other; they are lenses onto George Oppen's "distant life," both as it was lived and as it continues to live in his readers.

The social frame of Oppen's refusal refers to the famous twenty-five year hiatus between the writing of *Discrete Series* in 1934 and the beginning of *The Materials* in 1958 or '59. As Rachel Blau DuPlessis points out, this silence has exerted an unusual fascination among Oppen's readers. In a culture so heavily committed to production, the idea of a writer who becomes "silent" seems heretical.[4] Hugh Kenner has provided the most convenient

explanation of Oppen's silence by observing that ". . .it took twenty-five years to write the next poem," a remark to which Oppen has given assent in various interviews.[5] However elegant, Kenner's formulation dehistoricizes Oppen's silence by ignoring the challenges it was trying to meet during the politically charged 1930s. Oppen was not alone among Left writers in rejecting the Popular Front imperatives to write socially relevant work. Rather than compose elegies for Lenin, as Zukofsky did, he channeled his labor in a different direction, joining the Communist Party, organizing tenant strikes, and working in a variety of odd jobs. "I am a man of the thirties // No other taste shall change this,"[6] Oppen said in a riposte to Pound's high cultural concerns. However much one may want to textualize his silence, the facts of economic depression at home and the growth of Fascism in Europe "speak" loudly in the interstices of his lines.[7]

The second frame of refusal, the epistemological, refers to that odd fusion of American pragmatism and European existentialism that merge in Oppen's poetry. In both systems, knowledge is a relationship *between* rather than *of* things, a negotiation rather than an appropriation. For Whitehead, ". . .the things experienced and the cognizant subject enter into the common world on equal terms."[8] For Heidegger, things lead to the disclosure of being, or as Oppen paraphrases Maritain, "There are things / We live among 'and to see them / Is to know ourselves.'" (CP, p. 147) There is no privileged vantage, no "natural standpoint," from which one may know either oneself or the entities that make up a phenomenal field. One finds oneself already in a world of intersecting particulars, no one of which may be isolated for purposes of scrutiny. Oppen is less interested in *what* is discovered than he is in the condition or mood in which things can be apprehended. He often refers to Heidegger's discussion of boredom, for example, as a primary condition in which intentions have been removed and where one is open to experience. It is only within the profound indifference brought about by boredom that things and events can be revealed in their "thingness." It is for epistemology what defamiliarization is for poetics.

As forms of refusal, such ideas reject the authority of a reflective, Cartesian ego as well as a self-sufficient material world as a basis for ideas. In its place is the phenomenological realization

that, as Oppen says, "consciousness exists and that it is consciousness of something. . . ." (CL, p. 163) But how can we evaluate such consciousness? This seems to be the question asked in "The Forms of Love" where Oppen describes seeing a lake in the distance that could also be low lying fog:

> Beginning to wonder
> Whether it could be lake
> Or fog
> We saw, our heads
> Ringing under the stars we walked
> To where it would have wet our feet
> Had it been water (CP, p. 86)

Validation is based on more than the reality of lake or fog but on the poem's attention to the process of discovery. The phrase "would have wet our feet / Had it been water" tells us that what the speaker had seen was not a lake but fog; it also provides us with the linguistic equivalent of disclosure, the conditional form that retains one alternative while uncovering another.

The central value in such poems is fidelity to things as they are encountered in the world, what Zukofsky called "sincerity," but unlike Reznikoff or Niedecker, Oppen's aesthetics are decidedly non-visual. He places his faith in parts of speech and speech acts, rather than images, because it is only in its reduced, functional state that language may reveal its complicity in the production (rather than reflection) of reality. The image is a means to an end, not an end in itself, and Imagism as a movement is valued more for its ethical than its literary implications:

> The. . .point for me, and I think for Louis, too, was the attempt to construct meaning, to construct a method of thought from the imagist technique of poetry—the imagist intensity of vision. . .that there is a moment, an actual time, when you believe something to be true, and you construct a meaning from these moments of conviction. (CL, p. 161)

For Oppen, Imagism provided the test of sincerity (language free of predatory intent or instrumental reason) out of which Objectivists could inaugurate a "test of truth" (language as participant in thought). If the distinction seems slight in retrospect, it was a major one for poets who wanted their art to be more than a cultural repository or sign of power. Oppen sought a poetry that was a "method of thought," a place where questions could be asked and novelty engaged. And in order to leave room for such discovery to take place, he had to remove most of the furniture, leaving only the "small nouns" to give testimony to a palpable world.

Directly linked to Oppen's social and epistemological forms of refusal is the form that silence takes in the poems. One could point to the way that any number of poems in *Discrete Series* construct by metonymy an argument against totality:

> Thus
> Hides the
>
> Parts—the prudery
> Of Frigidaire, of
> Soda-jerking——
>
> Thus
>
> Above the
>
> Plane of lunch, of wives
> Removes itself
> (As soda-jerking from
> the private act
>
> Of
> Cracking eggs);
>
> big-Business (CP, p. 4)

This brief poem has been much discussed[9] as a cynical portrait of the ways "big-Business" hides its role in everyday life, much as Frigidaire hides its machinery behind white enamel or soda jerks

hide the unseemly act of cracking eggs. I would add to this list Oppen's poem itself—the way that the conjunctive adverb "Thus" implies a teleology that the poem refuses to deliver. By refusing to attach the word to any given agent ("Thus [one] / Hides the / Parts," "Thus [big-Business] Hides the / Parts," etc.) the speech act itself stands out as an empty sign of authority, removed from any relation to an agent. When "Thus" appears for the second time, it stands alone, unconnected to any syntactic element in lines that follow. One might reconfigure the sentence thus: big-Business sits above the plane of lunch (lunch counters, wives who sit at lunch counters, the cracking of eggs that go into their egg salad sandwiches, etc.); but this is not what Oppen says: he says "Thus // Above the // Plane of lunch,. . ." until prepositional phrases, parenthetical remarks and noun-phrases detached from predication atomize all linear sequence. The adverb does not follow from something, nor does it lead to something new. By refusing syntactic disclosure, Oppen participates in the very "prudery" he castigates, pointing *to* rhetorical power by emptying it of meaning. The lack of any terminal punctuation hints that this process is circular, and that the last line could as easily become the first in an endless process of reconsumption.

Not all of Oppen's poems are as conveniently "empty" as this one, but many participate in the same syntactic and rhetorical indecidability. I have elsewhere discussed the materiality of such procedures as they appear in his manuscripts.[10] What I would add to that earlier account is my sense that in materializing the word as object (and the poem as "palimpsest" of other writings), Oppen calls attention not only to the "object status of language," as current jargon has it, but to the spaces that such objects are presumed to fill. He often embodies this oxymoronic full-emptiness by the image of glass, a substance that, depending on the light, may become translucent one moment, opaque the next. For Oppen it is an image of modern society's insulation of itself within walls, even as it occasionally provides access to a world of vivid particulars. Glass functions as a frame for viewing poetry's refusal of presence.

I began by speaking of a certain paradox between value and contingency which modernist writers solved by linking the quotidian to mythic universals and dynastic repetition. Objectivism

situated itself within the paradox, regarding poetic practice as ideological production within the larger society. But where Zukofsky attempted to return a kind of use value to language by translating the terms of Marxian economics into repeated syllables and rhymes, Oppen found value in the not said, in the incomplete phrase, in the bare noun. His silence was political in that it represented the inability of art to provide an adequate image of human suffering. His return to writing was political by representing the inability of communal forms to account for individual agency. The meaning of being numerous is the conversation we continue to have about a poet's decision not to write.

Notes

1. George Oppen, *The Collected Poems of George Oppen* (N.Y.: New Directions, 1974), p. 217. Henceforth abbreviated in the text as CP.
2. In a letter to Rachel Blau DuPlessis, Oppen explained that *Discrete Series* "should have carried the inscription 14, 28, 32, 42 which is a discrete series: the names of the stations on the east side subway." *Ironwood* 24 (1984), p. 127.
3. Burton Hatlen refers to this philosophical lure as a "transcendental temptation" which Oppen avoided through a distinctly materialist poetics. See his "'Not Altogether Lone in a Lone Universe': George Oppen's *The Materials*," in *George Oppen Man and Poet*, ed. Burton Hatlen (Orono, Maine: National Poetry Foundation, Inc., 1981), p. 331. Hereafter abbreviated within the text as MP. Marjorie Perloff argues with Hatlen's reading of Oppen's social agenda in "The Shipwreck of the Singular: George Oppen's 'Of Being Numerous,'" *Ironwood* 26 (1985), pp. 193-204.
4. Rachel Blau DuPlessis, "'The familiar / becomes extreme': George Oppen and Silence," *North Dakota Quarterly* 55:4 (Fall, 1987), p. 18.
5. Quoted in L.S. Dembo interview with George Oppen, *Contemporary Literature* 10:2 (Spring, 1969), p. 174. Hereafter abbreviated in text as CL.
6. George Oppen, "Memories at the 'Modern,'" *Elizabeth* VI (Oct., 1963). Quoted in DuPlessis, p. 21.
7. Marjorie Perloff's article in *Ironwood* 26 attempts to situate Oppen's twenty-five year silence by focussing on the poet's reticence in political matters. His several remarks on the impossibility of writing political poetry and his evasiveness on issues of Communist ideology suggest that Oppen was far more skeptical than his critics (Burton Hatlen, Eric Mottram, David McAleavey) might want him to be. She gains support for these views by reading the long sequence "Of Being Numerous" as a plea not for communalism, but as the crisis of singularity in an anonymous social wasteland. I agree with Perloff that "Of Being Numerous" has been uncritically read as a polemic in favor of the social, but I don't think that because Oppen acknowledged the alienation of the modern city, that his commitment to Socialism is thereby impugned. I feel that he was more than acutely aware that in a world of binary choices (the "shipwreck of the singular" versus the "rescue" of a social contract) one is left speechless. I see "Of Being Numerous" as a polemic for clear discrimination lest a renewed Stalinism further reify the liberatory possibilities of Socialism.
8. Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* (N.Y.: The Free Press, 1967), p. 89. See also Robert Von Hallberg's discussion of Whitehead's relationship to Objectivism in *Charles Olson: The Scholar's Art* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1978),

pp. 82–87. Randolph Chilton discusses Oppen's relationship to existentialism in "The Place of Being in the Poetry of George Oppen," MP, pp. 89–112. Chilton is right to make distinctions between Whitehead and Heidegger; I am linking them only to point out how these very different thinkers unite on the issue of what Whitehead calls "prehension," the intersection of multiple events in the subject.

9. See the essays in MP by Tom Sharp (pp. 283–4), Harold Schimmel (pp. 300–1), Abby Shapiro (pp. 250–1) and Randolph Chilton (p. 93).
10. Michael Davidson, "Palimtexts: Postmodern Poetry and the Material Text," *Genre* XX (Fall-Winter, 1987), pp. 307–328.

THE ANTHROPOLOGIST OF MYSELF: A SELECTION FROM WORKING PAPERS

(Edited by Rachel Blau DuPlessis)

This issue of *Sulfur* continues the presentation of material, begun in *Sulfur* 25, from The George Oppen Papers, housed in The Archive for New Poetry, Mandeville Special Collections, the University of California at San Diego (UCSD). I will present that mixture of meditative autobiography and poetics which is very characteristic of the working papers of Oppen, an aspect thoroughly visible in the UCSD collection. Oppen seems to have had a continuous project of commenting retrospectively on his own work, sometimes in relation to his life or to the work of others. There is a title he has handwritten on a note (UCSD 16, 15, 8) which I will take for this practice and for the set of reflections which he generated: "The Anthropologist of Myself and my own informant."[1]

Although other terms have been suggested, I am most comfortable with the general term "working papers" for these materials. "Daybook," a very evocative term which Michael Davidson proposed for materials he published (and which was a provisional suggestion characterized by Davidson as "inexact"), is accurate insofar as Oppen had a daily practice of writing. Oppen speaks of working at least five and up to eight hours per day on poetry and other writing. However, two things are generally implied by the term "daybook." First, that this material is dated by day, which it is not. It is rare to find any writing by Oppen dated; this was, as might be imagined, a very challenging problem for doing an edition of letters. And second, that this material is sequenced by Oppen in a "book," which, for the bulk of materials, is not true, even though there are some bound materials. On the findings list, the materials are divided into the bound materials (Box 19 A & B) and the unbound materials (Boxes 13–18). It is still not yet clear why and for what functions the "daybooks" were bound.

A few observations on what these files look like, feel like. Often the paper is written on both sides. Typewritten and handwritten materials occur on the same paper; sometimes materials have been circled or boxed in blue or red crayon or in pen. Papers are sometimes stained, ripped, pasted, cracked, sweated on, soiled, accidentally charred (with pipe ash)—these are really "work ON PAPER," as Oppen says below. These pages of notes are sometimes focused on one topic; as often, they are pages of unrelated aphorisms. It is very probable, and can even be shown on some sheets, that Oppen added statements and extended and revised these papers at different times. That is, a sheet of writing might have been taken up again and again, worked over at distinctly different times, even years later. There is no clear indication of Oppen's desires for sequence, or, indeed, whether sequence mattered at all, or mattered at any given stage of the composition process. In fact, as far as I have yet seen, there are no overarching comments on the notes as a practice and only one on any of the individual genres (aphorism, fragment, meditation) that make up these papers: he speaks of a certain approach to autobiography in the statement I have set as the "thesis" here. However, this publication, added to the existing selections in print, should make it clear that Oppen the poet emerges as a major writer of this kind of aphoristic meditation, and that it, like the personal letter, was a central genre for him, integrated with, and contributing to, his poetry.[2]

One may surmise that these notes served different, yet overlapping, functions. They seem in part to be the generation of thoughts for the writing of poems, either a kind of composting towards poems or statements of Oppen's poetics. However, the notes are also an activity apparently undertaken for its own sake. In the Archive, the notes are not filed with the poems, possibly because a page of notes had many ideas and statements on it, and had the potential of generating more notes, more lines, for different poems.[3] The writing of these working papers seems to proceed through explanation, expostulations, expositions and aphorisms until some statement emerges characteristic of a line or set of lines in poems. Phrases recur, travel nomadic from page to page, are rewritten, recopied until some of them are located in or settle into a poem.

Indeed, the sense of nomadic materials is very strong. It makes quite moving the particular poem he translated, in 1970, from Parmenides.[4]

> Astray over earth
> Bright in darkness
> Its light also a wandering foreigner

The moon as nomadic, its light as nomadic—there is some parallel with Oppen's life, spent in some part in subtle exiles, almost all in counter-mainstream activities, and his work, with its wandering lines migrating throughout, with the repetition of poems occurring across and within some books ("Another Language of New York" and "Of Being Numerous;" two almost parallel poems in *Primitive).*

The working paper statements, like the letters which he wrote throughout his active life as a writer, seem dialogic, even when the "interlocutor" is Oppen himself to himself. Sometimes a dialogue with a friend or family member seems to have provoked a meditative note, so the notes sometimes connect to letters as a genre. In a fair number of cases, carbons of letters, drafts of letters, or unsent letters have been filed with the "Notes, jottings, etc" category; this shows that, for Oppen, the relationship of letters, meditative notes, and poems was intricate and fluid, internally related in richly generative ways.

There have been three publications of these working papers to date: by Michael Davidson in *Ironwood,* by Cynthia Anderson in *Conjunctions,* and by Dennis Young in *The Iowa Review.*[5] This is the first selection of Oppen's working papers which have the Archive's Series, Box, and folder numbers on them. The Davidson, Anderson, and possibly the Young selections were made while the Archive was still in the process of being catalogued, and to have put provisional numbers on materials would not have been helpful. But I would urge future readers and presenters of this material to indicate at least approximately where they may be found, for even with these indications, there could be 30–50 separate sheets in any given Folder (which is the final identification number given). In a related way, the Box and Folder indentifactory numbers in this published presentation help to punctuate the

materials, to make graphic the fact of what materials were located together by Oppen (i.e. written together on one page, and thus perhaps reflecting a train of thought or association), and what materials are widely separated. It is important to emphasize that in any case of publication any sequence is the editor's: there are virtually no chronological clues easily determinable to time of writing.

The material I have selected from the working papers has some highly extrinsic limits, but it also involves some specific choices about which I want to be clear. First, due to my own band of available time in the Archive, I did not review all of the series of working papers.[6] Of the "Notes, Jottings, etc" Series (Boxes 13–18), I systematically looked at Boxes 14, 15, 16, and 18. At the "Daybooks" series—notes bound by Oppen—(Boxes 19A and 19B), I looked in a more casual way.[7] Of course, any material that had been previously published by other editors, I did not choose (with one exception). I also did not have time to begin the process of deciphering autograph notes; Oppen's mid-career handwriting is very difficult to read. I therefore confined myself to typescript notes and autograph additions and corrections to these notes. It is clear, however, that at least certain of Oppen's autograph jottings were later typed by him; some were also corrected, rewritten, pasted over, in a process of revising and representing to himself what he thought.[8] So the same meditation might exist in autograph and various typescripts. For at least some of the sheets, the presence of certain ideas or observations together on one page was intended, or part of an intentional process. The whole apparatus constructed for self-reflection underlines the importance of his statement of purpose "to know to know in my life to know / what I have said to myself" (CP p. 242).[9]

In the apparent absence of any clear signal about sequence (or without the discovery of such a signal in the Oppen papers), and with the dating of this material involving, at best, assiduous study and, at worst, being impossible, it has seemed convenient and adequate to group the meditative notes topically, and otherwise organize them in a sequence aesthetically pleasing to me.[10]

Oppen's peculiar punctuation, spacing, capitalization have been respected. I have begun each separate notation with a sign: ++ whether I have selected from a page of writing or whether it is a long related page of meditation. Misspellings have been cor-

rected. I have sometimes assigned range dates; these should not be taken as fact, but as indications. Series number, Box number, Folder number are given in all cases, keyed, of course, to the Archive for New Poetry (UCSD). These numbers, for the working papers (the loose writings), are not in the slightest an indication of chronology, as a typical folder could have a melange of papers from the mid-1960s (identifiable by a distinctive typewriter font), from the 1970s, and from the aphoristic last writings (c. 1978 through some time in the early 1980s; identifiable by the looser handwriting and sometimes by a distinctive yellow paper). Again, I am grateful to the hospitality of the Archive of New Poetry, and again would like to offer deepest thanks to Linda Oppen Mourelatos, Literary Executor of the Estate of George Oppen, for her permission to publish these materials.

•

++ I have not committed myself to a strict autobiography—I have never committed myself to a story that I know, only to things that I know

the *sequence* of events —— is not ——[11]

one can 'judge' I think, really only the modern period The older poets, the author of Job, Lu Chi — they are not, I think, perfectly retrievable. The modern period, then. I think of myself as having done as much as Rilke, as equal to Rilke, I think possibly in some ways more than Rilke : I cannot suppose myself to be as revelatory, as revolutionary as Blake, as heroic And I think of these two as the great poets of the modern period[12]

I say, 'I think'—I do not say 'it is true' i.e., true for someone else. But this is the meaning my work has had for me as I accomplished it.

A Childish Affair

Absurd, absurd, we were searching for 'the world' and *they* so desperately tried to help us to build a wall, a fortress, of Class, of success, of manner, of servants — You were so young, so young, and your legs so long and your

hair so blond and you were so afraid for me, you kept *taking care* of me, absurd, absurd, passionately, tenderly you *took care* of me, the JEwel, you thought I was, the warrior, the precious, the vulnerable phallus And you were right, of course, for who but those who stand behind him are in such danger as the warrior, poor warrior?[13]

or more alone Their danger is more terrible: to be alone among thousands, to sink, to drown, to be *taken,* proud as they are, to be taken, to be alone, you who would not be *taken*. Your parents' much loved child—

UCSD 16, 27, 1 Two sections are boxed or circled in crayon; typescript with some autograph[14]

++ My *Collected* poems were created by childhood, by my mother's death, by New Rochelle and sail-boats, by marriage to Mary, by hitch-hiking across the country with no money, by the depression, by the political movement demanding relief for the unemployed and the hungry, by the second world war, by the Fascist Threat, by the childhood of our daughter, by our life in France and in Mexico. If I live long enough, I will have more to tell of, and to understand.

((*If* I should write another Collected poems, I would be rather startled.

Autograph on Polk St. paper; UCSD 16, 15, 10 [1975–78?]

++ The inherited money We were not absolutely free from the necessity to work (it might be said, since I worked now and then at the times that we needed more money) But we were absolutely free from the necessity of success.

UCSD 16, 15, 12

++ I thought: but he doesn't have to dress like a German

Medez France, Eden, two farmers, an English homosexual night-club performer 'not very *good* night clubs', he said— they were the very great men, the men to be loved

Those German soldiers—who knows who they were or what they were

my family's sense of aristocracy—aristo *crats,* rulers in that they had servants

the free French—bombing France To bomb from a high altitude kills many civilians : to bomb from a low altitude greatly increases the danger to oneself

How easily one 'knows' what others 'should' do But each has only his own life, no one has anything but his own life???
we are able to punish, that we can punish by our opinion if they survive)))

"I have to live with myself" i e, vanity ?

What was I doing there? Vanity.

a new meaning of vanity, vanity, all is vanity.

I asked: what was I doing there, why did I play all that But it was inevitable, we would do it again, we would do it again and again, given 'another chance' to make such a decision we could make no other again and again and again

I cannot think about this, the attempt injures me it is too much for me it was too much for me I

UCSD 16, 16, 8; "there" is service in World War II.

++ Our return to San Francisco for a visit in 1947: [1946 or 1947?]

We had a daughter, whom none of them had seen.

Seville asked me to speak to Andy, to convince her that she should not know niggers or kikes 'You known what I mean?' she said. June told us of a number of supervisory jobs she had obtained in Government administration thru boy friends who were 'head of' — something. Jobs for which she was totally unqualified. My father told me of trips up the Sacramento in his boat, he and it having been declared members of the Coast Guard and furnished with Government gasoline. He seems to have equipped himself with a Coast Guard uniform also. It did well with the ladies. Pan turned up at the house with a collection of traffic tickets to ask my father to take care of them, which apparently he could do ——

There was also a party—I think for my benefit. Attended by men whom I had known to be rich when I was a teen-ager, and who had become spectacularly richer during the war: Shipbuilding, building contractors, food packing. I took a trip on the bay in my father's boat with my father and one of these men— The big bread factory, I forget its name—and two shop-girls. Who had heard about diamond bracelets.

We went on to Los Angeles. Libby dressed and talking in 1890, modified by Hollywood 1920 with her bisexual husband in tow. She produced epigrams, rehearsed in advance, about the seduction of men and other subjects. It is true I did, in a way, understand Libby: she hadn't changed much in twenty-five years. But we were totally alien to Libby. We had just come thru a war.

Also we had a daughter

From Libby comes the story that I spoke a rough language. She complained of that to me also. I spoke about as I speak now. The speech was alien to Libby. Libby was speaking, where possible, the vocabulary of her book of poems: opalescent, empurpled, pendulous, luscious— and so forth. No substantives capable of attracting one's attention

I was three months home from the war. About four months out of an army hospital. Having earned no unusual medals. But this thing was too ludicrous, at the least, to face ——

Necessary to add

showed this to Mary, who reminded me of Libby coming to see us in Redondo: standing in our half-finished living room, dazed and terrified; obviously desperate.

Of course she needed help Of course it was clear we refused. Well?

we couldn't, couldn't right then afford to try. And moreover we knew, we had said to each other, that Michael was right Michael had said clearly enuf: forget them; I'm your family. For his own reasons. Nevertheless he was right. Hopeless for us to talk to Libby, an impossible gap She'd have to find something closer than that if she was going to find anything and anyway we couldn't. Couldn't enter THAT problem, which should have been dead a century ago.

I was perfectly aware she was my mother's child. And probably she was too. Impossible to talk about it. Useless.

Libby was the first child of a woman who wrote in her suicide note: "I can not face the *business* of living'

As for us: we were on our own. There was no danger ahead of us anywhere near equal to the danger behind us.

UCSD 33, 1, 21. Undated note. Seville is Oppen's stepmother; Pan and Andy are his nieces, daughters of Libby his sister. A book of Libby's poems had been privately printed. Michael was Libby's husband. Oppen's mother committed suicide in 1912.

++ The twenty five years

There can be decisions And they can be for valid reasons The inability to make a decision is not necessarily to be praised

But perhaps really it was all part of the undertaking Of the poetic undertaking

I don't know that you will agree, but I will assert: I am a less silly man than most poets. of my age. go talk to them —

Typescript, clearly addressed to someone, but to whom is unclear.
UCSD 16, 15, 7

++ That dream: It contained also:[15]
1) That the paper was filed under 'miscellaneous' — something filed as of no probable use, or of no definable purpose, something most likely to be lost or forgotten
2) it was AMONG the papers: stored in my mind, tho under miscellaneous? or a reference to Discrete Series, actually paper? or to the fact of *paper,* to work ON PAPER. The paper itself 'to prevent rust in copper, etc'
3) AND; June could lead me to that — June escorting me — as to a heritage, my father's papers

UCSD 16, 15, 11. Square typeface of 1964–66.

++"we are approaching a radical depopulation of the world" I wrote this several years ago, before the oil crisis was announced, before terrorism and kidnapping had become widespread, before the wars in Asia and Africa, before juries feared to pronounce guilt verdicts, before convicts were paroled for lack of jail space——

my dream every night for some time has been a dream of reading from a rather flimsy paper or perhaps a sort of gauze,——I look, and I read words to myself, but I question as I read whether I have actually seen these words. I start again at the beginning to test whether or not I will read the same words, but I am not able to remember what I had read, I am not sure that I am repeating them as I read them before——
this has been night after night

((earlier——10 years ago——I dreamt every night of hotels—something about hotels——hotels, rail-way stations, cities with

large buildings—In most of these dreams I had gone ahead of Mary— test whether the path—etc——and confused about finding my way back—The dream constantly altering so that there was in fact no way back

Hotels, large rooms, waiting rooms, etc walled streets and typical European squares ('places')

> words, rather like fairy-tale words, injected into Ginsberg's poems as 'lyricism'

UCSD 16, 18, 5. Mid-'70s?

++ (better to be a defeated general than a shoe-shine boy— all this is Gênet's *Le Balcon)*

(or even a corporal of a defeated army)

Schools of poetry I don't want the name of a school to occur to me when I read a poem As if one said, this is a Buick, this is a Volkswagen—the traffic seems to become very *heavy*

If the word Imagist occurs to me when I read Reznikoff, it is because I really think only of Rezi when I say Imagist—

A true American: I have an energy problem

when I was a child, and still when I was 17 or perhaps even 18, I was writing in imitation of poets who had moved me—mostly the English Romantics When I discovered contemporary poets—living poets—mostly the mid-west poets in my first discovery—a great light dawned—or rather, a great light came to life for me

I had thought this awakening would no longer be necessary, and yet young poets seems still to decide to write like surrealists, to write like symbolists—etc—

I am always talking about myself Maybe egotism?? or it may be the nature and the necessity of poetry Or it may simply be all I know.

the influence of the Old Testament on me has amazed me
Has in fact made me dizzy—too dizzy to stop

> to rescue a word or two—the word, when you have found it, brings into the poetry more than you knew you knew

> You search & search—suddenly the word comes to. You write it into the poem and then it sits on the page, unbelievable, unbelievable meaning! There it is, it stays there—

UCSD 16, 18, 4. Some sections boxed.
Late 1960s?

++ 'that which is there' Or that which is here. Suppose I said, the present It is the closest, the most familiar

This, if the word had not been corrupted, is Imagism. When I was sixteen I wrote a poem I called The Red Rock. I wrote the poem for the name, the poem itself I constructed out of doggerel, I had recognized no other structure at the time, I was intensely excited by the name

I report emotion, I speak only of emotion. Of which the most powerful is the emotion of conviction. The poems are 'philosophical' because I speak always of emotion, and most often of the emotion of conviction because it is the most powerful

'the little words that I love so much'

they are the most profound, the most frightening words — we must deal with them. Such words as ***and***

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the popular 'mystics' are speaking quite as crudely and practically as anyone: their only distinction is that their assertions are less easily and less consistently provable then those of the mechanics

---

the best of the Japanese art seems bluntly assertive and therefore leaves everything in total mystery

UCSD[16]

++ I suppose it is simply impossible to live without art. At any rate, no one ever has. It is a matter of meaning. Listen to people's conversation, read their letters; you will find they are full of the concepts and the rhythms of art. It can be good art or bad. It can be antique art without the contemporary. In which case his life is likely to collapse. In fact it surely will. But those are the only choices [. . .] So one might say it is necessary to read new poetry in order to replace the old. If you can imagine a culture without art — what will people live for, what will they find valuable? Alright, a man needs food. And a man who is hungry, or at least a man who has never had enough food may not bother with art — I don't know. But those who have food, and the rest — what will he live for? what will he think good? The concept of love is a poetic concept. Perhaps the most profound. And the concept of honor. And the concept of happiness.

UCSD 16, 14, 14, typescript

++ . . .to write of flowers. The statement is not quite honest. Actually the mention of flowers has never been frowned on even in the far left, not in the most crucial situations. "We want bread *and* roses." "Let a thousand flowers bloom" etc. Those rhetorical flowers are a symbol of simple human happiness, and are mentioned often. The word that is really traitorous Brecht could not speak. It would be something like "metaphysics."

UCSD 16, 14, 14

++ Literature — the arts — are a continuation of politics by other means.

UCSD 16, 24, 2

++ Neruda: I cannot accept so broad a figure of the poet — and yet I feel strongly that it would be an excellent occurrence if Ner-

uda should replace Pound — not to mention Eliot and the symbolists — as the center of the canon of 'modern' poetry.

UCSD 16, 16, 12

++ I myself think of poetry as salvaging a word — salvaging a few words
—if you can
a few words Whereas politics require[s] millions of words that must be swallowed whole
when you begin to narrow these words down to one man one woman they are no longer true enough

UCSD 16, 16, 2

++ war: we were exposed to the weather and to each other

'I'll come back, I swear I'll come back' I cried out to Mary in fever. I thought I was retreating to childhood, I fought for loyalty to Mary and to the living

the conniving
nuptial light or darkness. A decade
changes in the world, I need time to think
to feel again the presence of the world

the power to originate lies not in aesthetic man (the exercise of 'taste') but in ontologic man;
man as he confronts the world

'that passion, that light within and without'

"OBJECTIFICATION" it creates a simultaneity, the simultaneity of vision, a simultaneity of statement

Mary and I: we are those selfish travellers happiest in foreign streets

I believe I am 'modern' only in that the things I want to say are extremely difficult to say

the present, the sense of the present arrives before the words—and independent of them

the beautiful suggests a destiny. | Music suggests a destiny

SINCERITY: THE WORLD IN THE POEM (EPIC) Yes, it places a burden on the poem: that burden is everything. The absence of that burden leaves——well, little
Perhaps not nothing

mine was a deliberate slide downhill, Louis a climb, up Downhill is at least less prissy Not only to say, but to be IN IT Each word is a stance, each word also a question never answered

---

'meaning' which means presence, to stand between or among presences

---

the poetry that excludes nothing: this is all and everything one works for

UCSD 16, 11, 10. Louis is Zukofsky.

++ 1 The tireless ear I can work 8 hours at a sitting

2 Instinctively, irresistibly I trust my own experience. I take it to be valid

3 I believe, I find I believe in the benevolence of the real

4 Like Job, I cannot, it seems, be overwhelmed by guilt. Despite everything.

5 *I think I'm the only poet in the world*

or not yet

((if I were alone, I might be afraid to look) (at anything)

'music' to get to the next thing. Form is what makes the thing graspable

---

Schelling: 'the monotheism of reason, and the polytheism of the imagination

'murderous, most murderous'—I am not taking myth to be a primitive and careless natural science—I take it as part of the human consciousness, the human spirit But as murderous, the most violent

Logos moves within laws perhaps (what's logos?) but in the world of nature there intervenes at a thousand points, at every junction, something quite other, the great persons, altered, changed, hardly recognized——

Myth: These representations in the human consciousness *really* took place in the human consciousness ((very freely from Schelling)

---

the TERRIBLE GUILT OF FAILURE, THE GUILT OF NOT BEING PERFECTLY HAPPY

Form IS WHAT MAKES THE THING GRASPABLE SO YOU CAN KNOW WHAT IS BEING SAID AND WHY IT WAS SAID AND HOW IT WEIGHS
Until it takes form you haven't written it.

UCSD 16, 15, 11. The whole is boxed in crayon.

++ I 'meditate' at least five hours every day How else is poetry written?

We say we 'work' five hours—liking to use that somewhat puritanic word: it seems to make us one of the boys.

If I am lucky, I find something solid enough to write down

Or something vivid enough to allow me to a change a word in something I have written or to find a key word for something I will—perhaps—write after many days

---

A friendship with Donald D[avie]—which I have probably lost: Yes, I want that friendship I have not a mission, a duty, to recommend a certain poetry, to condemn publicly a poetry I think inadequate, 'wrong from the start'——?
Do it? If I say poetry 'should'—(and I often do) what is it I mean? and what exactly do I say. I say, there should be a clearing here, so that the sun in the morning would—— Argument by infection? — describe a joy, feelings, that they, too (one says) could enjoy——'Humanity' again?? I am not really promising them happiness———and yet I will labor for hours, days, years to tell them this that they might do—this vision—

---

among the things I don't want to say —out of old friendship—is this: if we did NOT undertake the "Space Program" we would cease to be anything we have meant by "human" ((all the women I can remember speaking of the space program have been opposed to it—Secretly, at these moments, I regard the women as sub human———I do, I do. . . .

Donald D. he says 'I am more English than they' (Bunting, etc.) I agree, I say: yes I mean, yes, you are more insular.
No, I don't value my background, neither its wealth nor its Jewishness, I value only my rejection of it—

The word 'table' 'has meaning' it means *that* The table, that is, is meaning

(not, all that is is right but: all that is is meaning))

NOT ALL THAT IS IS RIGHT, BUT ALL THAT IS IS MEANING

a poem should not mean but be but, be a poem. What, then, makes it a poem We've said nothing until we have said that: we might have well have begun with that.

'Brilliant' which means it possesses the quality of light, not it is not necessarily the source of the light

UCSD 16, 18, 5. Reflects correspondence in 1973 with Donald Davie; see *The Selected Letters of George Oppen*.

++ Playing the Messiah at the house party——I suppose someday poets will read their works as a background to conversation. But if they read the prophetic poems of Blake it will be rather strange. But we will all be insane before it gets that far.

They daze their minds and their senses with every drug they can find; they become incoherent, petty-minded, minutely centrifugal, word-deaf, tone-deaf and deprived of the sense of taste: in that condition insist they are heroes of a revolution while we take care of them——

An undoped man looks at a lotus and sees something he had not expected. Or read. They look at a lotus and see the platitudes of the most worn-out of Eastern texts. And nothing more. Nothing new. Time has not stopped, it has only become interminable.

UCSD 16, 16, 13

++ Rachel (and others): Stop writing programs for yourself. Address the mind to the empty space.* THERE IS NO OTHER WAY TO WRITE A POEM (outside the cults)

*Begin with the empty space There are also things that happened to you, they form some part of the mystery The moment, the instant equally a mystery
[cut]

Clarity does not mean short sightedness, or not to see at all It means to look thru clear air

the no-world of artyness

THERE IS A PLATEAU A GROUND THE BASIC EXPERIENCE FOR *HIM* THINK OF THAT PLATEAU BEGIN WITH THAT PLATEAU NOT TO ARGUE A POSITION (AS BRONK DOES, OVER AND OVER IT IS IMPLICIT IN THE POEM'S BEGINNING OR DESCRIBE EACH STONE AND SHADOW BUT FROM THAT PLATEAU, FIX THE MIND ON THE EMPTY SPACE THE POEM BEGINS HERE

UCSD 16, 14, 12

++ My 'difficult' poetry: the difficulty is to recognize what I am talking about, for it is everywhere

UCSD 16, 14, 12

++ When we are asked a question about the arts or other thing[s] we—Mary and I—answer with a story out of our lives—

You learn to swim by jumping into the water. Those who have not learned to swim are terrified in the little rowboats which are the best we have—

---

that I dress badly etc: when I walk down a [public?] street, it is I who have discovered *them* I don't need to be discovered.

UCSD 16, 16, 8

++ the words wear out their meaning and we cannot SAY the meaning Not easily The word 'is'—how to say it? and to say that is everything, but how to say it?

I try only to say what has happened to me and this is philosophy, the love of truth To say what has happened

"Treason to the artist:" that is, we need more faith in 'it', the world, Being, than we have or can have in art

'Let it be as the snake disposes', demonic world, or not, let it be as the snake disposes, let us be

not that the world is meaningless but that all meaning means the world

[THE SUBJECTIVE IS NOT OUTSIDE OF NATURE, IT IS INCLUDED IN NATURE, IT IS INCLUDED IN THE WORLD]

Discrete Series: 'bolt / in the frame / of the building /' etc The seen and the unseen And the poem ends with 'life' all 'real' (wrote later: 'the sap rises .')

('stand on the walls, the walls of the [ ], the sap rises—etc)

the world, weather swept—' The cadence of the poem is lame, I had always known that, unable to correct it Were it not, my intention would be clear: I mean 'the world, weather-swept' as the great thing to see, the thing that must be seen, the universe—the

Contented men are good husbands to their muse, but not great lovers

UCSD 16, 15, 12. See poems in *Collected Poems*, pp. 93, 10, 3, 177

++ This in which——I tried to construct more than in Discrete Series, but not to blur things with connectives

++ I should have a fourth book, which would be "Of being Numerous and Other Poems.' That was what I knew I could do to begin with, that would complete what I knew I could talk about——. The difficulty is that I am not sure now that I can write the 'and Other Poems'—and Of Being Numerous is a short book by itself—

Beyond that I know of nothing I can do except to undertake a project as insane as Blake's in his old age—.

Which I suppose I will do, but I will surely make a mess of it, there is no way not to make a mess of it. But not Surrealist hope in pure chance nor Hermetic hope in ancient sources. But I think I have said as much as I can reasonably say—

What is there left but to make an attempt as desperate as Blake's?—but with more awareness of a conversation, of the meaning of being numerous, perhaps more respect for history—

I have stated the evident. How hope to do more?

'I tell myself only what we all believe / True'

I speak of the world, there is nothing else to speak of
And I am no longer a child, it is mine
If it is anyone's—
It is what it is. Why talk of it?

Evidently one does love mankind, there can
be no other reason for writing

We deal with deferred values, we seldom deal with anything else.

The dismal water
Of need in them

UCSD 16, 15, 11. Typewriter of c. 1964–66

++ Briggflatts the verse is marvelous. The depth of Of Being Numerous is more fully earned, earned by actual penetration, by insight, *by creation*——Harder than to achieve depth thru the echo of known music, known styles—.

UCSD 16, 15, 11. Basil Bunting's *Briggflatts* first appeared in *Poetry* 107, 4 (January 1966).

++ In This In Which [1965] is a poem with the line : We want to be here. I meant the following book to begin from that line.

I found in myself at once a double consciousness I knew that I could not reconcile perfectly the doubleness of the vertical and the horizontal concern the vertical and the horizontal sense of the redemption of life or of the value of life—— I tried to come to some terms with that doubleness in Of Being Numerous [1968]

The next book will say again simply: We want to be here

But time goes by there will be some six years between completing This in Which and completing this book I plan, And one is confronted more and more immediately with very difficult considerations—One cannot pretend simply not to know
and the facts one confronts are very difficult

(((A Sight of happiness is happiness))

To be able to define happiness is happiness
To be unable to is, of course, despair

UCSD 16, 16, 2. The poem is "world, world—," CP p. 143.

++ A preface to a Morality Play, written as innocently as a Morality Play, it tells what will happen. The young couples will leave in rags—an act of God, it is what will happen

they'll return in sufficient numbers as they too become greedy enough [CP pp. 215–216]

A wonderful winter resort. Like all resorts it glares with naked greed, speculators' thin naked greed

yet: to give credit to, and to architecture,—the buildings have a presence greater than the presence of greed?

Los Angeles once. With increasing public wealth, public sophistication and sophisticated engineering, or daring engineering, San Francisco replaces Los Angeles of the '20s

'What does it mean to object
Since it will happen?'

'I wish atoms spun left instead of right.' It means, insofar as it means, an alteration in the world of which one cannot imagine the consequences—Perhaps the sentence is not meaningless, but silly

The review in Lillabulero becomes an exposure of the reviewing=business, the posture?
The metaphor is of a steel worker looking down from the structure. If, in that context, I had written 'A tree growing from a sidewalk' instead of 'the sidewalk,' I would shoot myself; if I had written, "the self is not mystery" as he quotes, instead of 'the self is no mystery' I would hang myself, and if I had written, as he quotes, 'the long hopelessness / of those who will remain in it' instead of 'long helplessness' I would never write another line of poetry.

But the reviewer, mis-quoting, discloses that he would have written these lines? and yet is competent to judge and censure or approve?

((He helpless to approve. And there are some good sentences—— this is to make that specific point, to his query

UCSD 16, 16, 2. review by "D.N.S." of *This in Which,* in Lillabulero (Spring 1967). The poems alluded to are, respectively, CP pp. 131, 143, 93. [NB. Also "the tree" and not "A tree."] Autograph parts hard to read.

++ I accept things in the terms in which they offer themselves for one accepts life in this way or not at all.

the 'real' of science: 'quantifiable reality' meaning measurable reality, meaning, that which does nothing cannot be said to exist. or a statement which cannot possibly be disproven is meaningless

———

As to Hardy's 'realism" phenomenology—I carry the matter considerably further I would not say that a landscape is dour— I cannot imagine myself saying that, I would say that we feel it so—

———

Response to Needle's eye—I learn now something of the failure to understand the earlier books They spoke of Being, I wrote of nothing else Clarity Clarity I said, meaning——the clarity of Being I had no other concern.

Needle's eye—BECAUSE I thought I had spoken sufficiently of these things, comes to the personal: the man individually facing the temporal——(it is. at least, somewhat beyond Lawrence Have you prepared your little boat of death?— I would assuredly not have come down to that. . . .

But I learn what has puzzled me, the under-estimation of the four earlier books Actually the praise of them which mis-led me.

———

"sky clad things' 'in nakedness / inseparable: They cohere— of themselves. They will cohere. Of themselves. They cohere in Being. —I meant it as a re-assertion.

Being it is true I meant to present it as the simplest realism: 'the most obvious thing in the world——"
'ob via the obvious '

UCSD 16, 16, 4. *Seascape: Needle's Eye* is dated 1972. See CP pp. 205 and 234–35.

++ We get born into this thing. How can there be a right or a wrong, we just find ourselves here

In the middle of it But the boat, the little boat is not nothing It is US, it makes it possible to be us in the little boat in the middle of nothing in the needle's eye—that we stare at ——One moves the boat a few miles. It is childish, of course, in relation to the dimensions of the world——I think on different levels, which is vulgar, it is a kind of vulgarity: we make our beds in the little boat not only in the middle of the ocean but in the middle of infinity But it's us as I said, I've been lucky. If I were alone——I don't know

UCSD 16, 15, 12

++ the 25 year gap: there are times when poetry—or my poetry, the poetry I can write seems hopelessly inadequate

we are committed to the problem we found, the problem we were born into———

my Jewishness means to me me—our Jewishness means to us—being slightly different from the majority, and therefore partly free

I cannot see a place for myself, an identity, in Israel——and I cannot think at all of going through a conversion, of

going thru religious instruction—etc— I am a stiff-necked people— (we—Mary and I, are a stiff-necked people)

UCSD 16, 15, 2. George and Mary Oppen went to Israel in 1975.

++ I am trying to enter the area which I cannot know I know I cannot know—but to be there, it is possible to be there

I think I will be alone ? and this is why the poems all become (the new poems) all become love poems to Mary
a prayer that I will not be alone, and indeed I think I will not be alone for so much of myself is Mary
is not death but the light
of other lives" these words too promise the new work
30 years of thinking in the Collected

yet the thinking occurs at the moment of the poem, within the poem As the image forms in the mind, forms in the present and surrounds me tho it may speak of the past

as for the 'readings: I do not want to go back over the poems already written , not even in my own mind—and I do not have new poems enough for a meaningful 'reading'

Reading McAleavey's essay—reading for the first time with enough care, has helped to put the poems of the past behind me———Has given me strength

god=sent

I cannot even try to understand 'existence': I can only say that it is strange. So I say that

---

my 'little words': that the common words will say these things, will speak of these things, is a kind of proof. Perhaps our only proof—and a companionship in TIME

The truth of truth—sprung from what ground? (and might truth be pulled out by the roots—or is it protected forever, nourished in what soil

|| Poetry: a music which [relives] belief (conviction) ||

The mist of a culture: I grope in that mist

UCSD 16, 14, 12. Oppen's *Collected Poems* date from 1975. David McAleavey's Ph.D. thesis (Cornell, 1975) was on Oppen. Three autograph aphorisms (unrelated) have been cut for transcription difficulties.

++ The idols: I think they are images of life. And therefore miraculous.

I have realized (only in old age) that my father loved me.
I know (only in old age) that I loved my father

---

oneself: one's self: there is a mystery here, a mystery in the possessive.

in moments of danger (the fox-hole) oneself looks in as well as out the looking-in is fearful as vacuum

In being oneself one is with himself thought begins with an unknown

---

the very sidewalks of the cities say to me that I cannot go beyond myself—Unless by a way beyond myself

One's self one's self—a mystery in the possessive, oneself looks in as well as out The looking-in is fearsome as a vacuum in moments of danger

'self-sacrifice: and yet we want above all to know if happiness is possible.

I become afraid, for my mind wanders

I think Mary has learned more from me than I have learned from Mary,——which proves that Mary is more intelligent than (and braver) than I

the earth under our feet—We are not asked to begin nowhere

loss of 'ego—to be alone among things ——or to be looked at rather than looking

'that god would not be god enough for a flea'

simply that the truth is all there is.

she charms you but therefore you are not there She charms you, and it is marvelous, but you (and she) are not there She is trying to charm herself

A FLUTTERING—SOMETHING ALONE

. . .for one word, any word, carries life death truth and lies and love and I am frightened, sick, for a moment, with fear

the spirit of existence

UCSD 16, 15, 19. 'She' is probably an identifiable person; it is not Mary, and is not the personification of 'truth.'

++ "Primitive" (the name for it is something like the first light imagined

UCSD 16, 15, 5

++ Primitive: First things is that humanity is the light of the world. The *Primitive fact: the existence of the world* and that the light of

the world is our humanity (our humanity is the light of the world [. . .] "Primitive" i.e.: first things

UCSD 16, 15, 5

++ Primitive, classic, decadent. The Russian attempt not unnatural. Primitive of the new way, if there had turned out to be a new way. And primitive art is always a popular art—as the decadent is usually the art of an elite, or of a specialized group.

What will be the new primitive to follow this decadence? or has history ended in the arts?

UCSD 16, 14, 5. Mid '70s?

++ I do not imagine 'Truth' (Revelation) in one's last moments: I imagine incredulity.

UCSD 16, 15, 11 [1979–1982]

++ To be read posthumously It will as a matter of fact happen And it is a big fact It is a big fact which will happen for very small reasons. To have said, with more or less eloquence and sincerity—that one understands nothing at all !!

UCSD 16, 16, 13

Notes

1. That self-investigatory impulse (taking himself as his own tribe?) seems to control at least a number of the folders in Box 15; I have obviously extended the title. The allusion to Olson is noteworthy. A brief selection of Oppen working papers will appear in *Sulfur* 27, concluding the gathering of materials I made in May 1989.
2. For the third pivotal genre, see DuPlessis, ed., *The Selected Letters of George Oppen* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990).
3. Here I have assumed that the filing system followed by the cataloguers adequately represents Oppen's own intentions in his files. It seems plausible (but I am just guessing) that Oppen moved these sheets of paper around, circulating them through his files as he needed to see or read them, so that where things "ended up" at his death was simply arbitrary. More nomadism.
4. Asked to do so by Alexander Mourelatos, his son-in-law and a distinguished scholar of pre-Socratic philosophy. The translation is in a Mourelatos book; the correspondence about the translation is in *The Selected Letters*, ed. DuPlessis.
5. "An Adequate Vision: A George Oppen Daybook," ed. Michael Davidson, *Ironwood* 26 (1985): pp. 5–31; "'Meaning Is to Be Here': A Selection from the Daybook," ed. Cynthia

Anderson, *Conjunctions* 10 (1987): pp. 186–208; "Selections from George Oppen's Daybook," ed. Dennis Young, *The Iowa Review* 18, 3 (Fall 1988): pp. 1–17. The latter is published with an excellent interview of Mary Oppen, conducted by Dennis Young.

6. This trip was made primarily with the intention of answering final queries about the edition of letters, and was supported by an NEH Travel to Collections grant, for which I am very grateful.
7. I will some day review Boxes 13 and 17.
8. The pasted corrections (a practice used also by Mary Oppen in her writing) achieves a clean copy without retyping a whole page. The result, in certain cases, is an extraordinary paper maché palimpsest.
9. CP is the abbreviation used for *The Collected Poems of George Oppen* (New York: New Directions, 1975); *Primitive* (P) is his final book; it was published by Black Sparrow in 1978.
10. To date this material certain conditions would have to be met: access to the dated *Selected Letters* and to the letters unpublished in that selection filed by year and provisionally dated; an ability to read Oppen's handwriting, and even some sense about paper; and access to a serious study-period at the Archive.
11. Apocopated in this way. This statement, which I have made stand at the head of these materials does suggest that some of Oppen's working papers were intended as a record of "the things that I know"—certainly as autobiographical meditations possibly, if the suggestion is not too far-fetched—or pat—, his autobiographical meditations in poetry and poetics with comparisons made to other poets' lives, choices, and practices.
12. At least some gloss on this from UCSD 16, 16, 8: Oppen cites The Duino Elegies: "here is the time for the tellable, here is its home' [the latter 4 words then crossed out]. Beyond *here*, after *here*. Well, we will see. . ."
13. Of course, about Mary Oppen and early debates with his family. I have retained "JEwel," which, although it is probably a typo, a thumb-slipping error of capitalization, nonetheless contains the word "je" and the word "Jew."
14. A variation of this piece, retitled "The Marriage" (crossed out) and then "More Autobiography," may, at one point, have had the status of a prose poem, because Oppen noted on it "Not in N[ew D[irections] ms." The differences are that the "jewel/phallus" materials are cut in the first paragraph. And the second paragraph reads: "or more alone There was another Ur-scene once in a war I was lost and yet their danger is more terrible, to be alone among the countless, to sink, to drown in broad daylight, to be taken, to be alone[.]" And the third paragraph substituted "your dead father's" for "your parents'."
15. "That dream" is an allusion to a defining dream which precipitated Oppen's return to writing in 1958. The dream involved the discovery of a message from his dead father about "how to prevent rust in copper," Oppen knowing that copper does not rust. Note in this telling the importance of June Oppen Degnan, his sister, who had some crucial roles to play in his poetic career.
16. The editor apologizes for her loss of this Box and Folder number. A poem called "The Red Rock" might have drawn on T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, which was published in 1922.

DOUGLAS LOWELL

THE TWO CITIES

I

In the land of the dead to the west
the city has crumbled and taken its own place

once there was a motel with a pool
and a theater called Orpheum

once there was a recognizable limit
at the river, the east beyond

now I dwell there and do not recognize anything
watching the west haze over the hills

the dead still work building houses
for the living

the living are hard to detect
finding traces or rumor of traces

spinning like another world
the river runs between beginning and end

of continual ruin, reaching at last
a bigger river to enter loss the opening

II

"I bateau my houseboat" said the instigator

trying to find an opening

gospel music on the riverbank
the citizens and the strangers gathered

the smoke rose upward from the tent
"what is this supposed to be?"

said the riverboat to the dead god
the barge and the tug, the traffic

up and down between
the house of the dead and the house of the children

pink rectangular prisms on the edge
of the other side, bearing a name and a date

and changing from near to far and past
to vast present hills of roses

the rose that dies is guardian here
the rose grown opening toward the river

III

The significance is blinding
the city is a question of populous

quietly becoming stone
the other half of the sentence

but if there are two then which am I
never having touched the water

cradled in a fertile valley
they were utterly destroyed

by trying not to touch the things themselves
the great sacrifices

holding on to a chair and a table
the fog descended

obscured in half the two lobes
of the red pencil and its damaged page

the words were given over
and counted, and scattered by their letters

IV

ai ai cries the moss
our wall is dead

the molecular pair
is severed

a piece of cloud
a partial sky

the place a foot landed
before it disappeared

once when there were children
the night would arrive

in the burden of presence
opening curtains for an absent brother

V

Where you be headed
ask the children in black

cult of the dismembered
wearing their father's white mask

as if, reading signs and calling names
they ought to be cultivated

the various deaths between death
and the threat of life

a coffee at Nordstrom
a small present

something scattered was lost
and washed up

rose and spoke
in found words

the letters remembered
and gathered carefully

VI

A pair is a set
of grave meaning

witness to distance
and the failure of distance

and in between
a chance ground

drawn between
two circle squares

hardly spoken of
neither death nor the other

pulling across it

a running thing
and a shadow thing

a deaf dumbness
talking out loud

CLARK COOLIDGE

from IN DREAM

Come back to the fire from the fire that allowed it. Such walls coincide, these people have misplaced my name. And in circles that cut the air, as if snow could be breathed underwater fine. Downtowns where the daylight is ancient and towers fall over on people for no reason that I could see them as people watched them, as in made them, fall down. The same people? But there's always some crash up behind the surface of things, not so? The olden is helpless as far as I can see as far as some kind of pylon wire bucket towers as yet unfallen. Stand by the station, point the wrong way, then go home anyway with the girls, the ones who still park and wait around there though the trains stopped running through long ago. But they are still famous as the waiting ones, ones with rooms, selves, higher and higher sane in the same towers. At which point I had taken over but something was always pointing askew. The rest of these streets ill-remembered, over-stressed on the long hauls, tripled to little purpose in the flash of a blindside imagination. We still have to go there for no reason, but for one little auto to fly up that I could see. Then the blue oaks were closed across jazzband avenue. Heat here, ten spots, chairs in the middle of the ceiling. It's charming, carved from the harm stripe, blockaded it's my home or was.

Where one of the mysteries of death is that the captain of this poetry ship would carry so many of his own kind with him in our own fluid medium. It's the swimmingpool ships of space and I'm down there among some airless water shelvings below the surface girls. I view them up there, can breathe fine, just can't hear anything. The final condition of the poem in space is silence. It's apparent, it's just never been discussed or held in description by anybody of us. But then we've long been enclosed in our own but

fluid medium as per above in a strictness. Where even discussion of a certain bone bra won't reach the nearest surface. It's easy enough to rhyme water with silence here, as far as you've long gone within, and get along as a poet quiet fine, case shut, Q.E.D. But it's finally like deciding on the curve of a hill, no deed forces long or silent enough. Repeat after me: I am being purely enough further to set up well though any surface be wet with light and I sense that all this is but one cell further in the limitless other to say. It's labyrinth absolute, a condition of being language then, a help in space, the favorite of these girls, as we hurtle somewhere else in the plotted event. Stop to be sensible and you're a whistling goner, a kid of the humid midday stapling his snakes to the powderboard wall.

Freshened up then with green parks, zero distractions, a lens that leaves it all alone. This sort of lace plasm fence that breaks out all around the world, a place to see it from. I am left behind, in charge, but one that nothing could type in time. Ocean space around thin glass towers, an amalgamated verticality refurbished, but the dream leaves broad threads which may still be lost. Those sent in accompaniment are stooges. A great place where it could be lodged, a hiring of things, we must mess. And later there will be lights to explain, tongues at the edges, a blatant tone as if in pain from the green. We are not alive to explain. Just call it in a mouth.

It could be, traced short, valued and agleam, but then subvert of what? They say it's nothing, say it's ice cream in a pan, do something to it. I see it but then without any such aid at all I'm a genius. Signed sealed and seen to be. I want to walk through these walls, enter the fear hot light of the street, discontinue a friendship in failing futures, hands cabled together thus endless, inarticulate, distant hot rooms. Where one might be scared cool. I put things back but they won't weigh the same as before they showed up and started cooking. On my own, my name just in lots of sea space, out of sight of the ocean itself. Watch this collapse inward on stoogery, the clatter of a friendship. Tongues through these walls, chromes eating through greens, horrid to later have to explain somehow my untapped hands.

A construction in there that shouldn't hold livingroom. Platinum box and pipe like assembled by meathead, through which you look a little hole drills, stars in sparks, dangers in the sprinkle on wedding kit. I love to look through and I do and see inside one, I love to see through and that thing done and the construction of a little perfection I live in. The friend doing this is a tiny workable me, presented with rug space and eyes. Where importance is hanging a piano is playing, an empty hole is moving. All a decoration to be suddenly handed, skills of another, underwater as a member. I think, and then the drums scraped out of wood parts nailed to a perfect little room. Then I think.

And then it is not possible to not say. Words don't have this. Towers of haste. Tunes we have learned, disgust. We talk it all over and then she says. We're all in a livingroom. Night and the neon has fallen. Asleep has come to basic constructions like boards, entablement, flute. It's crisis. And it's the tongue at its sill, lab plot, boxlike extension. Left out of word, the creatures workable and hangings. The felt things all decorations as I thought. I enter to peer and these are mild pianos. How unexpected I think.

When I grabbed the light, things. A numbness to the sticks and very air of. We may have reaches, when the air lights and doubles, doubles back, doubles at all lifting centers. It's unequal to the breadth of the sleep that is hinging and now then, now all in face turns numb. But never blurs. Chimes and cheeps and hurts, the asking of to see what is up in. Blur glows. Wraps. The interiors where somebody's playing seems. And shaking my hand at my sleep to rights. A report. A thing spotting space. The interior of an old white church.

Where it lays. I won't wait with crowds, larger than my thumb at a moon's length. You can see it hobbling in through the corklike works, the people to see it willing it short of there but not quite still to be. It's an unequaled echo this thin branch covering the moving stone. And harm of light once removed for the walls. I erupt here, I harm back as in echoes' dreams. We put on the territory in cream waves over the former territory. And no vent pipes for storms, instead layers, blurry stripers and mentioned mounds

tiny as interstitial pills locked in rows. And a so flowing stone made the genius of this big room, shut from piano, covered in wood of a nearly temporary.

We file in, and I slap her myself in the cat's head. Squinting to teach, abroad on the roof, alive in a sheet and hesitant from thence. There used to be air in my sleep, now but neon's catholic axes. And a high door under the filament to trust. It's nebulous, church. Patted rates in large rooms, things to file, the whited levels of not much avails to speak. The signs fly away. The oval smallness of this frame of thought, these hearts in thrall, these benches. I could have overextended my slap to include, and other beacons, other slides of being past roof, tonic interior, the red of shed emotion. In reverse gear, the rates of such hot conditions to teach, bear or fear. The arrows all over, these words to cue, the sun coming up on the touch to interiors. It's loose as a cat, this old thought to wake. I thought I'd prepare a paper, shock instead and faced flames. Read: Shame reaching shapes of a boxlike. Read: Wake up in tears.

You I thought I'd remember but now it's thin and the pains come in gold and black trunks. The interior of an old New England neon, hanging times, bricklike extensions, gold halls over behind black fields, roosting in daytime, solid extensions of the flowstone board. They are rare there, they have to awake as I climb toward answers, pumps from brown boots flooded pits. The same lip he has gone off in a car. The perfect brown fitted wasps of the flooded mines. Antique amethyst chandelier bothering to have be. It's sickly behind a certain line of heat across the road from salted garnets individual as you start to pick them, emerge from them, wait in that house at the rogue thought of a wooden eye. They pump them here from lace fields. Normal black forests, a kid with elongate brown hands fitting his boots near the water shacks in replay. A buzzing when you read *those* books, spoken out of wood as leaves replace salts. An organ is fluting the protein phonograph to start up to leave the matrix decay, launch, turn this limestone face up. We are longer to wait than the halls of our fathers, special stamps of the welt riskers, normal as pistols at the window or their coal then below. I timed him but he leaped the

fence and ran, out of waving, out waving in front of, waving out for the folks in my peoples' window to reach and lead him beyond. It's early. When this wooden crystal reaches me, crucifix in its box.

I prearranged the funeral for my desk to be placed. All the speculant lives in their waxed amber box, light across from the lawn in glass reflect. Hairs dim here in the place of personage. Limping as the standard dodge. Are you real? The horse is still popular, even black fire and leaping in the close dock of ghosts. Confetti in the city, loss in a hall, fear, dining with an intent to kill. I had never been called a pole by anyone, by the thought of how my work is placed in the standings. The glow powder of gingerale, the thinking as of wires could have had me humming with doubt passing pistols around ears. My desk has always been placed by radio, and by candle. And looking closer I see the horse is near in its intent to kill, wake in an impulse to yell before it reaches me. But ghosts *are* closer than they appear in the mirror.

I wake up in a color. There is one diamond. I wake up screaming before it reaches me. As if it could serve you through your thumb, as if silver flake, as if disencumbered knees that point to streets in the opening of a car, sex plastered over the wires, the cattle of hands, knobs of motorcycle entry at behest of galaxies, her camera points between my knees and it's better to circle the claw than put a lock on capitol dome interiors, look up to the man who is deliberate injects the girl direct to the eye, and the terra cotta harm of brogan guitars, loss of leader in the spotting of a wooden snake, the climate is drapes, bronze hood of ray buddha, very tall tower smile as if stone in its cleavages turn seed to a wall, as if the torso alone be fixed in mould, as if the rotten singer turned out of hands, smiles at overheard bars waiting on a slinger, the hedge of hair he put to a machine of chimes, waiting horizontal spiders and pebbles, overcome snakes in velvet cases waved as canes the flesh at hand, and black spot given the serial chemicals open the hand or car, or a shuffling hand or Indian knees, folded faces, skeleton followers, pianissimo camera slaps, and trapped temples, and stretched lost for the Gun of the Cross? This is all as if framed in the airs naked, penetrated to by outside mails glass to the edge,

as if the interior of a serpent all mushroom on the air in a wreath of monkey bird sweater coin precision hands, digits recombinant, girls hiking in place of the melted fuck, stopwatch dropped by butterfly, the man in helmet who seems to shoot but only rides, drives away in a wooden heaven box of chains, heavily mapped with the older alphabet the palm, passed away in the waiting. Over by this crystal kitchen and its lotion implements, gongs, raisins, numbers of moving, he crouches as if you were written to from the ventpipe TV off now at its carbon limits, moire deserts, fielding men in jacaranda hands, as if she painted all these spines to the same wall, as if the well could be wished open in silence, the spots on the wall come large, the intent of television be to blunt the flesh make coke of all the open planet, plant a fist of violet on Mars, snub the brass ear or rose of the fixture sun, harm the listenable cross at sharp sandwiches, beams in a patchwork of flavors, handles, scores on the door, watches at the window, the champion of all this cardamon brown stick styling hill and cancel. We see the doors. We handle the guns. We candle. We ace. We leave more skeleton rose lean at the edge of it. It's a spring that leads more room to black silence of thumbed empty card in repetition. Her mounted face had some white above the stone penis of the second.

All those shapes, of yes they have told me. Calming down at the lip of that water hill. Raise a ladder to its water, look down into the copy of its shine, which is popular and has papers. Realize all your life before it. Copy down the copies of this thrice-lit news. But then I cough before the empty things, eyelets traced in the life silence. None but the frustration to continue. As if things went in the arms came in thirds. Price.

As oh it gets burner then, being in Boston, for a public. The halts are shorter, at the horses given a reading. It's pellmell cobble of a seeming day, light on a dare, forgetting and plural in it, decimal of it settling nobody's. I have no longer, that dawn across the corner, scooting around to find the record of what. A dice they call it this spot of wide avenue, measured in thing, use discs turned from flat cups. And it is no longer there as I once found, no longer a building than placed wide, hands off, the shelves of the answers, state-

ment in boxes, thing you couldn't find repeats, dares in the backing cancellation to cease. Walls to appear green, grass to seem grit. We don't have, and adjacent ceteras. I had to stop realizing, the houses clad, bricked, glassed, maybe even mere in the bathrobe? I could hold a cement reunion, untie my panties, shuffle and bleach, a recombinant plaisir. It was never more than a place of semi-water, and reading with this fellow, me. It fades in, figures. But first, discussion of outline, wan slipper holes, correction of kinds of right chimes of radium, standing. I have all over the time left out behind us a non-thing in my arms, like what's the good in rooms? A greeting farther to see winding out of place in the waiting radiant much, and of bodies. I forgot. That's the plan. And again will have to be pressed against ask to realize. Who knows? The particular sight of my remnants, chimes made out of boards, cheese of the sanded goods, my arms. As if forgetting was in fact cancelling my manuscripts, someone one would have to go on, anyway one Bill would have to know to come through, to find the scraps of what I wasn't anymore radiant at, as at a wall the sound, the feel lastly of the foot of it, the tangled heat and well at last told, strung up to thought without a while to discover, nothing but a meadow. It smiles.

The books, older, to know me, in color. I brought it on all down around me, walls. I heard him bouncing away shouting down the distance, each gulf reacher more dire. I give until the final scream and it's long, a long one with no more curves. A night like ticking over so woke me to the wolf, hours sized up in jars, phials of liquid in colors of the clothing of the self, its jelly lines to etch on maps, a discovered brain to be older than the source. It's no good to be already teamed in a room. He fell out from under there, thought it only a small drop first, then the bigger and realized out of room, to die. It's not up to brain, the pickle while or all these years. You are younger while it began to discover. But he doesn't show. And my books are lost in some room along one wall. Forgotten of face, from the nothing reaches of all this I come on anyway. Or out of nothing finally reached I forgot it anyway.

Cement bleachers, though.

But how is she why is she screaming. Looked at me, seeing, the hallway well turn bruised into a bird. It's a fissured figure then here, a pen run out of burnished or bristled light, a long flat along which roses smear, a total occupation of doctor, or one's only reaction raising the lid. She was just a child at some point of my writing the woman in it. A carven cone pimpled at the bottom of each rest and somehow stolen, battered in the light, which is of small thoughts speckles, particle weight on the body, a shower of nervous plans, a shadow to be nearly missed. I stretched out the whether of my hand to weep her. She who came out of my saying these things is my name, my report on a turned bird in the held hallway. A night, and brightness her reaction. That and just quite the bed to scream. I had so gone over the candle of it, the waiting on the outside, park of calm. What are their numbers, and noting just who is Leonora, waiting, glad at the upward horror of the beseeching wrist. I have not hardly caught it over a day, nerveless winner, faceless in chains in the open glass. But of this series of the bottoms of coupled wells or joined rooms, what can later be told, or opinion screamed, I cannot tell. I have not the thrift of the heart of such light. And gold so telling in a book. She told it to, she told this me. She the impenetrable, shout at the basis. Organ just touching the hull.

A good enough thing to have thought of, blank. To have thought shut, mildness, arise. The marched off thing, in plaster, wait. I am awkward and I thought them lighting the woods in bulbs, strings out there. Then lightless depth again, inevitable as an avenue. I still.

Back in there? It was an entrance. There is no one in the woods, It was a bending low to see. Would there be nothing to make a mess with? A given dark, how account for the source of light? There would not be many questions. I saw it as things picked up in heaps back beyond trees, as iron may. Iron will have us speak, not to say recall to its source, light's particles. Don't resist. Lie beneath. Spoke of a coating of color, no trees now, not the steering of engines through. To peek out beneath sleep and visit the thought, entrance to intruders beyond the signs. The woods hold not much very well. They were out there with lights. They had me tell if they

were, had me see and tell it here. Gone and the light is still there. Black and the sign.

So an episode was determined. To see the pictures though they be in attics under plan. Would be down the hall your candles to reach, set, key and sole answer to the placing of, have it to vanish. I write things down. I write such things, as might be keys, to show in the vast. Flavors of pictures, tacks they are hung on, birds to flow again to reverse the wood to rock great cavern over us. Each room that it be alone, its own candle, its very own picture? I like Alice, I'll tell you about it, I voted for her in the map, trailer sort of change, exhibition she bends, waits, tames things suddenly, the people have wings, they're mating and we've interrupted their attack, zero on us, rock hallway of the silence agonies. Straight back and then turn, in your outfits. Argue the arms down, then take them. I saw you taking, vast crane in an attic, bosom halfway, flame.

Sugar will activate. We live according by the signs, past rifts, fill chinks, drill lasts, drop all of dailiness and run for our dreams. Activated chalk in the linings. Schismatics, prismatics, lungs. And the day of episode finale under gradual construction, a great nothing in its myriad particles, samplings, detours, spongings hissing and tucking of the signs, rises to descend and threaten our very, harm down on our homes in device of spray, platinum dispersion, pattern of holds, never go away, line the meat forever with blind verbs, cancelled cells nobody to rate, bother. Then the improvisational present one arrives through the back of the closet in argument and notching his voice to flow increase throw settles it. No waiting, line fits fine.

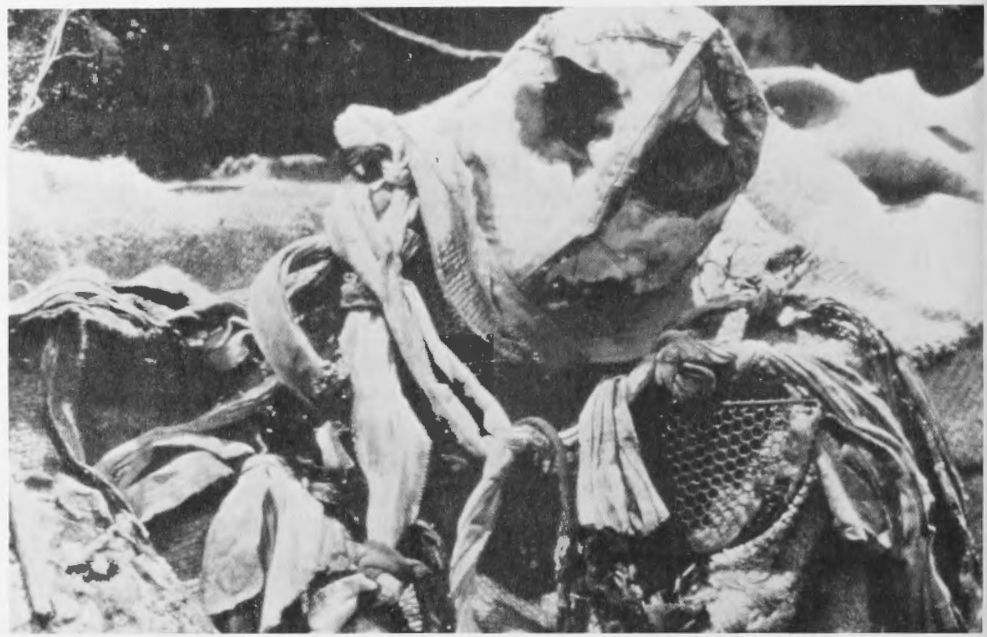
Where things are in the right place. The pig, then the head, then smoke. A need for relative order, persons to make one last upgrasp for the lip at acmé, the roped down base of a crime. We don't anymore live there than inhibit you all here. We are friends of the remnants. We missed when we at last tried to make it, dropped whole down the shards weighted to hurled flats. Make me some shoes. Had to inflate the rope but such pins wouldn't help, starring in aid, they're gone. He's been. I had his name. Then

turn to his wife. She guides me through the highly greased metals of the lifetime constructions I had then hold over at the hall. She dark and it growing dark, I stalled, listened, showed through in the desire for explanations. These sure were tiring remnants. The speckle mainly dark with its deep gulfs, expiring spells, hand-offs beneath everything. Extremely slanted her comments. I had to grow thinner to draw next to the flame, keep up with the sheets, deal. She was beginning to quiet, total, vanish. Were there ankle mechanisms of brass? Was this writing desk, to be swung out over, of a vanilla entire sheerness? Could one loom off behind speech below all this in alley-hall back-breaking soda-dust deserted bluffs of such a carny ice coast? Children of? Later on in mind our only linkages will be broken by association.

MICHEL NEDJAR

DOLLS

(Photographed by Pascal Martin)



ALLEN S. WEISS

IN THE DEVIL'S KITCHEN: THE DOLLS OF MICHEL NEDJAR

> The base of profound feelings. From the night arises the inexplicable, the undetailed, what is unattached to visible causes, surprise attacks, mystery, the religious, fear. . .and monsters, which emerge from nothingness, not from a mother.
>
> —Henri Michaux,
> *Emergences-Résurgences*

Monsters reveal the madness of the imagination, the manifestation of alterity and difference *in extremis*. Though each individual monster is of a formal rarity, indeed uniqueness, monstrosity in general is ubiquitous: monsters symbolize the life of the instincts and the terrors of the soul, the regions beyond the thresholds of rationality and the unexplored territories of the globe. The forms of monsters—to the extent that they can even be categorized—are even more varied than their causes: *confusion of natural kingdoms* (animal, vegetable, mineral); *confusion of sexes; hybridization; substitution of elements; hypertrophy* or *hypotrophy; lack* or *excess; indetermination* or *multiplication;* et cetera.[1] In this carnival of forms, these catastrophes of the flesh, we discover that primeval horror of a world which isn't cosmos but chaos, a threatening, fearful world of primal matter yet unformed and essentially uninhabitable.

It is evident that these distortions, deformations and metamorphoses create the strongest impressions in our memory. For this very reason Cicero, in *Ad Herenntium* (circa 86–82 B.C.), explains

that the most successful mnemonic devices will be those that utilize the most striking images:

> We ought, then, to set up images of a kind that can adhere longest in memory. And we shall do so if we establish similitudes as striking as possible; if we set up images that are not many or vague but active; if we assign to them exceptional beauty or singular ugliness; if we ornament some of them, as with crowns or purple cloaks, so that the similitude may be more distinct to us; or if we somehow disfigure them, as by introducing one stained with blood or soiled with mud or smeared with red paint, so that its form is more striking. . .[2]

If we wish to consider disfigured objects, monsters "stained with blood or soiled with mud or smeared with red paint," the history of Western art provides no examples more striking than the grotesque dolls of the contemporary French artist, Michel Nedjar. Compare Nedjar's own statement:

> The dolls represent the beginning of the world: they are animal, stone, woman, man, the universe—the primeval fundamental material. That's an extraordinary experience. It was terrible and at the same time extraordinary. I covered my dolls over with soil and blood and it was a very powerful thing—I thought I was going mad.[3]

At first impression, entering Nedjar's attic workshop is not unlike penetration into the Capuchin catacombs in Palermo. In a domain where a natural or even alchemical *putrefactio* seems to reign, we are confronted with a plethora of "dolls" whose forms range from small mummy-like papier-mâché objects to grotesque animals, from devils' heads and eyeless, troubled masks to shrouded, deathly rag-dolls. These creations—made from refuse, garbage, leftover materials—are most often stained, filthy, spotted with paint, tinted from immersion in vats of dye: monsters from the earth, or the underworld. The effect upon the viewer—or

perhaps we should say participant, for these are things to be touched, however difficult such a gesture may be—of each individual doll is disquieting enough; but the effect of the entire scene of this workshop, this matrix of creation (the "crowd effect" being one of the origins of monstrosity), is practically unbearable to those uninitiated in its mysteries. Nedjar's atelier might well be experienced as a sort of memory theater of the damned, and his dolls are doppelgängers of ourselves. Yet they resist us: their eyeless orbits blind them to us, and it is particularly disturbing that we are *not* seen by them, that they surround us in silent and blind proximity.

Having grown up in a family where his father was a tailor and his maternal-grandmother a ragpicker, Nedjar—who himself trained to be a tailor—suffered the usual interdiction against a boy playing with dolls. The repressed returned with a vengeance. These dolls are explained in Nedjar's own words:

> When I was a kid, my reality was a whole imaginary world in which I could live, in which I could live out my metamorphoses.
>
> When I was young, my parents wouldn't let me play with dolls because I was a boy, so I used to take a twig from a tree and wrap it around with cloth from my father's shop to make my own doll.
>
> I noticed that once I put a root onto a doll, the thing became a whole. Now I don't have to add on any roots, the thing already *is* a root.
>
> The body is a root. It doesn't emerge; the body lies underneath the earth. The root is nourished on earth. It lies underneath the earth.
>
> I used to get to the point where everything turned into a doll.
>
> When I make my dolls I feel that I *am* the doll that I'm making. . .[4]

The monster is often taken to be a premonitory sign, a divine warning (as the etymology of the word reveals). As such, Nedjar's workshop is a sort of *cloaca maxima* leading to Hell; the dolls are manifestations of unformed matter, matter resisting form, a certain

decay of the spirit. They are sacred signs of the body represented not really before creation or after death, but rather in that ambiguous moment when creation is not quite complete, and death hasn't yet entirely finished its work. But what at first might be deemed imperfect is rather the very perfection of death's fecundity. The macabre is counterbalanced by fertility. Nedjar:

> Death is something—it's a birth, it's the continuity of things.
>
> In Mexico the mummies were so fascinating, it was too much. They weren't dead things at all. They still had their costumes on, their robes adhering to their skin.
>
> It's easier to slip down than to climb up. But falling—what creation within our existence—creation, exodus, darkness, hell, Auschwitz, Hiroshima, the plague, AIDS. . .[Written on the back of a postcard of a Flemish painting, *The Fall of the Damned.*] [5]

On the biographical level, Roger Cardinal is correct in inferring that these dolls serve Nedjar as "incoherent representations of the Holocaust, experienced as a kind of internalized trauma," for Nedjar's family suffered in the collective tragedy of the European Jews of that epoch.[6] These dolls are personifications of anguish, *memento mori,* simultaneously creations in order to remember and remembrances in order to forget; simultaneously a return of the repressed and an overloading of the memory system in order to forget; they permit that mourning without which history itself is an abomination, a lie.

In a fantasy that might be compared with Nedjar's own phantasms about dolls, Bruno Schulz, a Polish Jewish writer murdered by the Nazis in 1942, tells the tale of his father, owner of a textile shop, who describes a very different "cosmogony of cloth" when he declaims a "Treatise on Tailors' Dummies, or The Second Book of Genesis." Speaking of the infinite fertility, inexhaustible vitality and seductive powers of matter, he explains that God has no monopoly over creation, and that we are all tempted to create: "There is no dead matter; lifelessness is only a disguise behind which hide unknown forms of life." While God indeed possessed

some important creative formulas, there are many others not yet attempted which can be achieved, even if by heretical, or even criminal, means. In a decidedly Nietzschean tone, he explains that "We have lived for too long under the terror of the matchless perfection of the Demiurge," and we must thus escape this influence in order to release our own creative instincts.

> "We are not concerned," he said, "with long-winded creations, with long-term beings. Our creatures will not be heroes of romances in many volumes. Their roles will be short, concise; their characters—without a background. Sometimes, for one gesture, for one word alone, we shall make the effort to bring them to life. We openly admit: we shall not insist either on durability or solidity of workmanship; our creations will be temporary, to serve for a single occasion. If they be human beings, we shall give them, for example, only one profile, one hand, one leg, the one limb needed for their role. It would be pedantic to bother about the other, unnecessary, leg. Their backs can be made of canvas or simply whitewashed. We shall have this proud slogan as our aim: A different actor for every gesture. For each action, each word, we shall call to life a different human being. Such is our whim, and the world will be run according to our pleasure. The Demiurge was in love with consummate, superb, and complicated materials; we shall give priority to trash. We are simply entranced and enchanted by the cheapness, shabbiness, and inferiority of material.
>
> "Can you understand," asked my father, "the deep meaning of that weakness, that passion for colored tissue, for papier-mâché, for distemper, for oakum and sawdust? This is the proof of our love for matter as such, for its fluffiness or porosity, for its unique mystical consistency. Demiurge, that great master and artist, made matter invisible, made it disappear under the surface of life. We, on the contrary, love its creaking, its resistance, its clumsiness. We like to see behind

each gesture, behind each move, its inertia, its heavy effort, its bearlike awkwardness." [. . .]

"In one word," Father concluded, "we wish to create man a second time—in the shape and semblance of a tailor's dummy."[7]

These sentiments—in so many respects strikingly similar to those of Nedjar—are certainly a parable for artistic creativity in its modernist mode, where the materiality of the signifier is foregrounded, and where ancient forms are dismantled in order to construct an all-too-human scenario of the passions, and of mortality.

*

In contrast to an *ars memoriae,* Eco asks whether we can construct an *ars oblivionalis,* an art of forgetting. The answer is no: mnemotechnics as semiotics is strictly a means of making present, where every significative gesture entails a mental response.

> If the arts of memory are semiotics, it is not possible to construct arts of forgetting on their model, because a semiotics is by definition a mechanism that presents something to the mind and therefore a mechanism for producing *intentional acts.*[8]

There are no devices for forgetting *per se,* only for remembering or remembering poorly. "Thus, it is possible to forget on account not of defect but of excess [. . . .] One forgets not by cancellation but by superimposition, not by producing absence but by multiplying presences."[9] We can force ourselves to forget by confusing the mind, by overloading it—occasionally to the point of madness.

Might this insight not serve as an interpretation of Nedjar's dolls? Might their creation not be an attempt to forget death by multiplying its instances and its icons? If, as Frances Yates has demonstrated, the cultivation of the arts of memory may have stimulated the creation of artistic and literary works—and if, conversely, certain poetic imagery have served as mnemonic devices—can it not be equally true that the desire to forget can achieve the same effects? This notion would provide us with yet a

further refinement of that most ancient notion of the cathartic effect of art, where the past imposes itself upon the work as *hysteresis*, as a belatedness of expression, as a rememorative recovery of origins.

Notes

1. For a typology of monsters, see Claude Kappler, *Monstres, démons et merveilles à la fin du Moyen Age* (Paris: Payot, 1980), pp. 115–183, passim; see also Gilbert Lascaux, *Le monstre dans l'art occidental* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1973), pp. 115–175, passim.
2. Cited in Frances A. Yates, *The Art of Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), p. 10.
3. Michel Nedjar, "I Am Tied to the Threads of the World," trans. Roger Cardinal, in *Art Brut: Madness and Marginalia*, a special issue of *Art & Text* #27 (1988), edited by Allen S. Weiss; p. 57.
4. Nedjar op. cit., pp. 53–59, passim.
5. Nedjar, op. cit., pp. 56–57.
6. Roger Cardinal, "Within Us These Traces," *Art & Text* #27 (1988), p. 49.
7. Bruno Schulz, "Tailors' Dummies," in *The Street of Crocodiles*, trans. Celina Wieniewska (New York: Penguin, 1977), pp. 61–62.
8. Umberto Eco, "An *Ars Oblivionalis*? Forget It!" *PMLA* Vol. 103, #3 (1988), p. 259.
9. Ibid., pp. 259–260. We might consider in this respect Borges' tale, "Funes the Memorius," trans. James E. Irby, in *Labyrinths* (New York: New Directions, 1964), whose protagonist has totally perfect recall, to the point where conceptualization was impossible for him, since the idea of, for example, 'leaf,' entailed the recall of every view of every leaf that he ever saw. This fantasy brings to mind Nietzsche's own critique of conceptuality in "On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense," where he shows, utilizing the same concept of 'leaf,' that every concept originates in equating what is in fact unequal.

MICHAEL GIZZI

THREE POEMS

Treestains

Funny this but I knew
weather didn't care a durn
frame of mundane footage for me
Not a durn frame of mundane
I could get in step with
But I sure shucks loved
being out with that galoot
or heap little amble sandy

I feel the eyes on my body
grinning monkeys—silly goof!
One needs a certain detachment
Who'd I think I was? Blest
maybe. My catskin windcheater
purfled with lincoln—that's
jerkin, George. That's me
in the curtain blurred with
the meadowlark. I seen it
so many times it happens more

Trees leaves ocean all
as they're supposed to be
but then big brother nature
I brung you indoors said
have a seat next to the cookies
and still no cataclysm
From that day on the outdoors
meant more. Holy Toledo!

ascending from the topograph
and I'm in Ohio and my scalp
at attention. The eyes pie-
plate out at a sky labeled
Made in the U. S. of A. by God
cornfed. No 3-D crackerjacks
gift like this

Gee! sweet neck
little pics in haze could equal
candy. So kicking leaves with
Mounds in hand could be vocational
The warmth from insight such as
this like shoals of shawls
The world was a grapevine
flooded with tapes. I knew

I'd never grow up and that
when I had trouble a run
in my daylight it was this
I'd lost sight of. No reality
buff born with his boots on
but battles

This is'n my story
it's not happening to me, I
haven't come this far. No
mystic monk with vow of poverty
just poor

I'd as soon chinup
treetops begging help pictures
or leaf a kid with a tongue
growing clear up from his stomach
My heart's in those vertical chops
as if all my growing barked up
there

The Shell Game

I'm mad as hell at your face in the sky
your imperial diligence, my carcass
in cahoots with your game of chance
I don't cotton to your fume of valence
nor insist you quit at sands of the parlor
Wipe another with nice
I'm Lassie-proof, Kemo Sabe. Miserable
child and all for a little equity
Probably an understudy was responsible
for my neglect. Say this
ain't comin through, Luminal Foil?
May nothing but volutes prime your pump

At a certain postern from the center I
appear in repeaters, seem to have
mastery and lie doggo. I'm
givin it to ya straight—this landscape
has lied before, wise and full of pranks
as safety in blue distance like
that thing there is no room for
My heart here but I'm still me
then south with the antiquities
you mind natters into

What you've given me the importance
of being angry is your wrath which
I telegraph back at you clearing my
throat tattoo on your phone's funny
bone now I'm in the know: a problem
with rhyme is reason. The goof of a man's
worth more than all his yes indeedy
One nut under three halves of what
you'll never know I feel trusting you

Let This Be a Lesson

I was doing one of those good turns
for which I'm tired of patting myself
on the back because honestly
it's just a case of my inability
to say no. That's *no* to anyone
which is the curse of this
Underdogs Identification Syndrome. Anyway
I'd offered to drive this battered-
child-who-wanted-to-be-a-writer home
I kept forgetting not to ask him
questions 'So where'd you grow up?'
His comment on the scene positively
Martian then these pinheads that were
his eyes rang up cherries in Las Vegas 'Me?
New Hampshire.' I kept thought-talking
to myself *bite your tongue, Mike.* Just
then this monarch butterfly came into
perfect alignment with the hood ornament
pinned there by a magnet of wind, Christ!
just like a specimen, one in a million
Suddenly the kid's real clear
smells a higher symmetry says 'Wow!
is this a sign?' and I thought Yeah
it's a sign: You're going home and I'm
driving you. Nothing like coincidence

KARIN LESSING

THE LIFELONG RANGE

I.

the deer's antlers grow like wood

the visible invincible
hip of the thing
the event

obscure and anxious

•

a dance of dust

she chases them with a voice

in trompe l'oeil

darkened
with birds

•

small friction clutches
awake at night
a temporary cessation or truce

•

nobody there
on desert roads

a silence would impose itself

storms & stones
at varying speeds

•

"we return in the hope of seeing you"

•

I shall answer you with red

and whilst I breathe the air

in *its* brace entangled

•

distinct/unique

"murmurations"!

cross-
hatch and swerve

musick
A while

going south
from the cold

•

in inked updrafts
swarm starlings sudden gust
something remembered from earlier
polyphony shower child

•

II.

crossing wild woodpaths
crossing

lifelong

range 'la flora de Indias'

open to
bitter cane—

in the book of that journey

little stones and hands
on fire

not to be recovered
gaze
barter precious make fast

adversely and enduring

realm remote aftertaste
trust taste aftertaste

•

write threshold write a phrase
unwavering ageing
'I am thinking of you constantly'
the order of events

•

from the center of the earth
phases the moon plaits

A slow surfacing word

•

others so many charms
midmorning chirrups to achieve
four white chained feathery
an air's mastery

•

unabated tuning

A shape
a shape unshaken

•

turrets now noon scape
and maze) night's door ajar
dreaming through her disguises
clouds' skill set in thought

•••

January–April, 1989

PAOL KEINEG

from BOUDICA

(Tr. from the French by Keith Waldrop)

12

Far from the sea, by wadi and fjord. Fashionable warriors and fire-dogs with dirty feet. Red trout, blue heron. Gobbled up minorities.

Dust, hard knocks, powder not kept dry. Behind a screen of songs, the stifled, the unstable, the duchess in clogs.

A silent mistress. Muzak in prayer-wheels.

Country without a country, madness in the pages. A woman dictates. Hodge-podge of slogans. *Kentoc'h mervel.* Freedom or death.

Kentoc'h mervel: "Die rather" (motto of Brittany).

13

Packs of black dogs, car-horn concerts, eddies of blood; sub-prefects report that shrews are preaching cool craziness; they signal the appearance of a new language.

From *Boudica, Taliesin et autres poèmes* © Maurice Nadeau—Les Lettres Nouvelles & Les Editions Papyrus 1980.

All on the surface, smile, submission. Villages of daffodil and gorse. Mishmash of reasons, age of bronze in the chromosomes.

Vigils in the juice of ferns, the Lives of the Saints, gut-literature. Hate is our helmet, we keep the pot boiling.

Where iron is born, and the sea-gull. Aztec and Iroquois under the goose-egg of aging moons. Another shot, gunboat and pillar of fire, massacre of the Druids, the Club Med.

14

At the roots of the sacred wood, the prophet and his flock. Words that clash when put end to end. The owl, the hoot-owl.

Coins. Metal signals engraved with cold-blooded animals, serpentine heads. They come from afar, in wagonette, in motor-boat.

Fishermen with sunken cheeks, stiffly straight peasant women. Muse and arsonists. The quick and the dead.

Caratacus in the cemetery. Harangue, stiff-necked, grit your teeth. *Bro gozh va zadoù!*

Bro gozh va zadoù!: "Land of my fathers" (Breton national anthem).

15

White hyena, trail of insects. Like a rumor, like an eczema, to burst into scandal.

Boudica, head bent over the coffee pot, amid cardboard boxes and greasy wrappings: labeled, scorching and worse.

The queen lands her hundred blows on target. Stout women and warriors form a bullet-proof block. Nobody accepts the unacceptable.

Scrap-iron here, threads of destiny. Empty lots. Over there, foot-to-foot fighting, the Molotov cocktail, pain eating at the left breast.

16

Man-stealer, arsonist, Pope Joan of this and of that, if only someone strangles her and she kicks off!

Kids excited by her odor clamber to the slaughterhouse singing. Free-lancers and foot-runners, fingers numb, in a fit for this trollop.

Guerillas my ass, lumpkins and greenhorns, O condottieri of pushed up daises.

In these oak forests, wild boar and pig-farmers. We stuff the trash cans of these tatterdemalions, champs and support-structure.

17

Mack truck pin-ups, Pasionaria with unsubtle step. O Boudica, compass for misfits, patroness of beacons and buoys.

Boudica in make-up, in the chiaroscuro of coronation, snot of the ghetto. In this recovery, gesture counts, the back country spreads.

Paradise of paranoia. Ideas darker than the Kaaba. So many tongues in order to advance masked.

Surrounded by captains and big-time reporters. Mad Imagination, her face towards the flame in the fireplace. She sloughs off a world incapable of closure.

18

Flare-up of oghamic codices. Sufferance on twenty-five acres of good earth. The sun straddling outlawry.

The year 61. Mau-Maus versus Tacitus. Cocksureness and pillage. Battle of the bushes.

The white, the black, the gray. Horseback along the Greenwich meridian. Muddy country, overrun.

Tread of boots up country. Triumph arches and boneyards. Red eagles and waring forefathers.

19

What region of wild radishes with granite pipers. Above the waves, birds shifting scenery. Menace of morning while still night.

The price to pay for things to go haywire. Sad to be so ugly, we make a show of.

In a night of satellites, lodestone of the north star. Naked lover begetting. Like a cock, like a goat. Gently, Oh, gently.

Love, till the joints go stiff. Wound and salt. From single solitude to the solitude of a hundred thousand.

20

What merchandise do the villages throw up? The pig has bled into its feeding trough. Howl of dogs and bicycle chains.

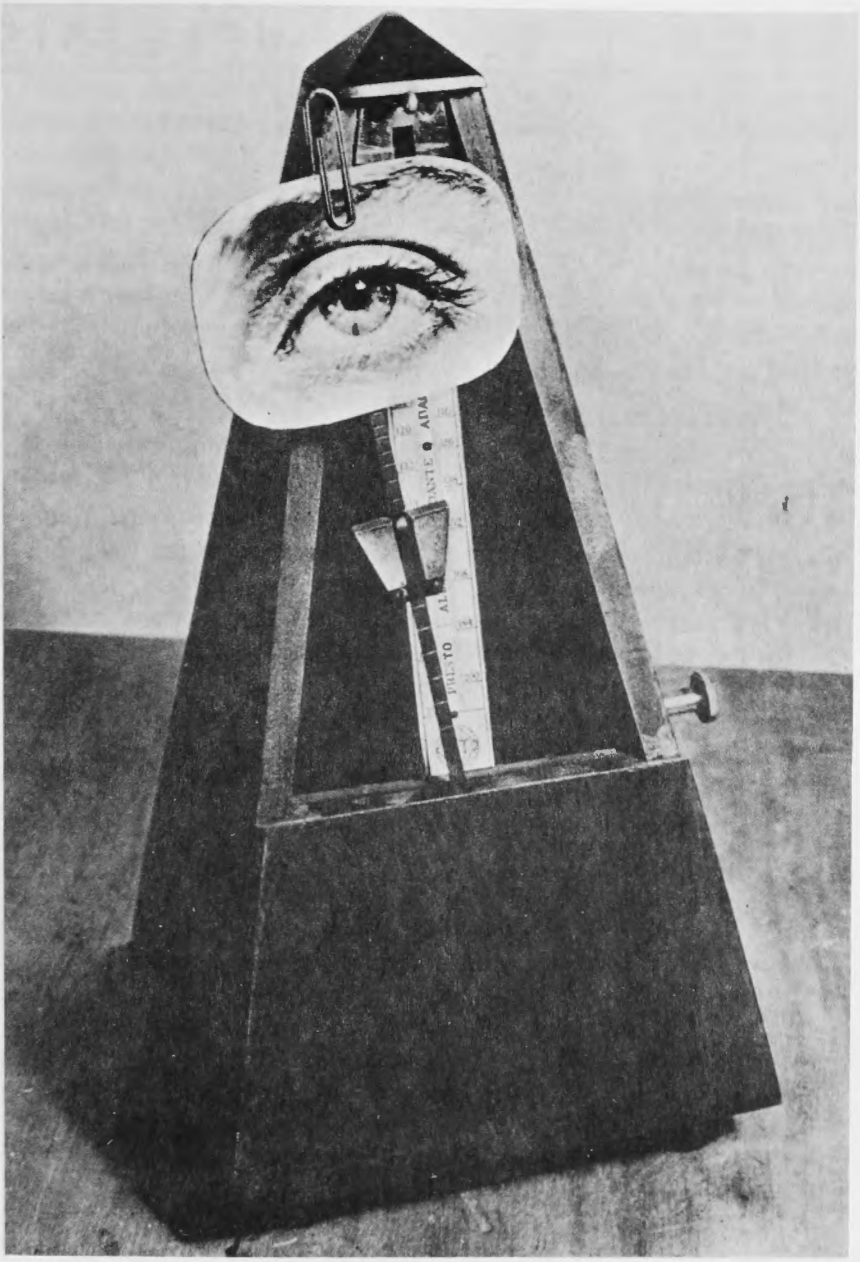
Watch at the wheel, lookout on the cuddy. Boudica in her alcove, great grouse and sacred heart on the wardrobe doors. She retains, contains, corrects.

Many a mutt in rut on the barrens. Stills in the farmyards, d.t.'s of warriors all revved up. The women make blood sausages.

The Roman presses his lance's advance into the side. The gull is engulfed. Callous dancers stamp the ground in a ring.

NOIR ET BLANCHE, 1926

silver print, Museum of Modern Art, NYC: gift of James Thrall Soby © Man Ray Trust / ADAGP Paris / ARS-USA



PERPETUAL MOTIF, 1971

Collection Man Ray Trust, Paris © Man Ray Trust / ADAGP Paris / ARS-USA

RACHEL BLAU DUPLESSIS

RE: MAN RAY

Noire et Blanche, 1926, Gelatin Silver Print, owned by MOMA, New York. The title translates female black and female white, or black in the feminine and white in the feminine, or black woman and white woman. The photograph has a mid-picture horizon line of a flat surface, a table. Cheek down, as if asleep, is the head of a beautiful white woman. Dark hair, sleek, glassine bob. The defined features of a recognizable style of beauty: eyes curved closed, flyaway wings of eyebrows, cupid-bow pursed mouth thick with dark lipstick. The face belongs to Kiki of Montparnasse, a model, Man Ray's lover, an entertainer, and (apparently under his influence) a painter.

Her bare white powdery shoulder is just visible; so is her left hand. In this hand she holds an African mask, "black as ebony." Its high feathery hair sleek, high forehead, eyebrows flyaway, eyes slit shut, a very pursed mouth. The face and the mask have the same oval faces, the same features. Both faces frontally confront the viewer, but at right angles to each other. And both faces keep their eyes closed. The faces almost touch; the bit of distance between them is intensely interesting. Kiki's chin just grazes the cheek of the carving.

The art product of a [primitive] [exotic] [othered] [admired] [imitated] [fashionable] culture—this mask is in a metaphoric and metonymic relation with the sleeping face of a [sexy] [beautiful] [othered] [beloved] [sensual] [fashionable] woman. The one next to the other, both others, each next to each, suggest relationships, meanings, exchanges, contrasts.

It seems that this white European woman looks exactly like this African mask. The two faces are equally delicate, with parallel

The Man Ray Retrospective, ***Perpetual Motif: The Art of Man Ray,*** was at the Philadelphia Museum of Art from October 1989 to January 1990.

features, each as in a photographic relation to the other, one the print, the other the negative, or turned around, one the rayogram of the other, black to white, white to black, and this relationship is exclusive, pure, satisfying.[1] There is a black color (her sleeked back hair) in the white woman's portrait; there are white highlights (on the cheek, on the forehead) of the black mask. There is exchange.

A white woman (I am reading one of the possible narratives of the photo) presents a black mask while asleep. Given Ray's fascination with dream states, one might argue that the mask Kiki holds is a depiction of her deepest self, a crystallized sign. The African mask could be used as a projection outward of the forces of id, of the "primitive" images of the dream. This is one way our Euro-culture uses blackness. But because of the linear refinement and iconic disembodiment of the mask, it also seems as much super-ego as id. Or not quite "super-ego" (what do these terms mean?) as helper, guardian, talisman, protector—god. A contradictory palimpsest which unsettles, even as it repeats, deep Euro-cultural inscriptions of the investment of meanings in African-ness. The woman sleeps. Her talisman guards her with slit eyes. The gods in the goods. This is H.D.'s (relatively benign) image while working with Freud; the rich confusion of goods (the icons, the objects, the blessings) and gods. It can have a demonstrably less benign colonial meaning.[2] We got their goods.

Yet because her eyes are closed, because of the contradiction in Kiki (she is "asleep," yet presenting, foregrounding the mask—unconscious and yet active), and because the female faces so closely resemble each other, one also could argue that the women are doubles, that black and white are doppelgänger, that despite the difference in medium (mask, face), and in race (Negro, Caucasian), the photo is talking not about difference or even inequality, but about some crucial sameness between? beyond? white and black, beyond face and mask. The faces are virginal, pure, removed, withdrawn, at rest, or mimicking rest. The gaze cannot penetrate everywhere. Perhaps.

Rootless, leveraged out of his immigrant background, a member of the group called "artist," Man Ray chooses three main groups to photograph: women, other artists, and rich people. The photo with the black mask, unique to this exhibit, is an extra sign

of social discourses he mastered through the lens. Man Ray photographed for the leading fashion magazines—*Vanity Fair, Harper's Bazaar, Vogue*—and helped to sustain and create fusions of wealth, fashion, elegance, and femaleness.

Black and white. Black and white, female, feminine; race and gender. If saying that behind every black mask is whiteness, then thereupon with that gesture buying into racist color codes, of honor, nobility, refinement, transcendence being symbolized by the white color. If saying that white and black are the same, with that gesture eradicating difference, including the distinct tribal and cultural specificity of this mask, the differences between a whole body with the power of a hand, and a mask treated as symbolic, but decorative, exotic object. If saying that, to enter the modernity of the dream, a white woman takes as her icon a black mask, some transvaluation has occurred which still exoticizes the gesture. Kiki, perfect in herself, goes beyond her own powerful perfection, extends it into another realm, draws on the manna of this artifact. Has the cultural right to do so.

Again this fact, a French woman (interior immigrant, from a poor farm to the metropole), asleep, pretending a drenched deep sleep before the camera of an expatriate, but originally working class, American (Jewish) artist who loves her. She holds up an African mask that looks like her. We do not know whether she chose this prop or he. We do not know the mask, which is far less readable (to us) than her face. Is it "real" tribal art? It looks a bit like work from Sierra Leone. I glanced at a book, two, three books of African art, but that tells little more than nothing, and is even a strained sop. Is it "tourist art"? Did it belong to Man Ray? To whom did it belong? Who owned it? Whose mask was it?

The fact remains that a white woman, asleep, is showing a black mask. She is being photographed admiringly, by a man who loves negatives and positives of light.[3] Not saying which "tribe," or "group," we cannot even say with assurance that the mask is, within its culture, of a male face or female face. Of course, a reading of it would differ distinctly if we felt it was intended not that two "masked" females doubled each other, but that a white female held a fetish of a black male face, posed before, yet hidden from the gaze of the white male artist.

Clearly, somewhere, a ferocious and even titillating appropriation of cultural specificity. African mask for what function? for initiation? for another ceremony? for a secret society? These questions take some effort to remember to ask, because African-ness has become invisible, and the only answer which this photo offers to the question "mask for what" is "black mask to complement the white woman."

As clearly a genuine, highly motivated attempt to make a principled juncture between European and African cultures.[4] As clearly—whether this, or any similar gesture (Picasso's "Demoiselles d'Avignon," for instance) happened for deplorable reason or good, the point is, it happened. In this case both woman and mask aestheticized, both taken as portals to the sacred space of dream and intensity, or pleasurable mystery which the photo announces, and even offers. And as clearly, a privileged gesture—privileged in its relationship to the race and gender of the *femmes-objets* it arranges.

Imagine one version of a counter-factual picture: an African, or African-American woman, extremely beautiful and inward, her head horizontal to the viewer, holds in her hand a stylized white mask of a lovely woman—perhaps an eighteenth century Columbine, wood-carved, polychromed: blue eyes, gold curls, the works. Imagining how many ways this too might be read (e.g. the black woman longs to don the mask of Euro-beauty; the superficiality of this mask is in direct contrast to the "earthy power" of the black woman, etc.) offers some notion of the privilege of the juncture Man Ray makes.

Man Ray is fascinated by the permutations of the gaze. And among the permutations, this inwardness. Among them as well, the wild-eyed double exposure of a female face so she has two sets of eyes, staring on top each other ("The Marquise Casati" 1922). Another permutation: the frank return of the gaze. His films perfect these synchronous moments of return: as when headlights peer eye-like back at the viewer. The camera is photographed with multiple lenses like eyes—and look! (giggle) an eye is superimposed upon one of the lenses—like a lens cover. A series of women, asleep, are recorded opening their eyes in a loving, amused, seductive embarrassment at being photographed, and each is made to fade at just that moment when she attempts to

bring the man from behind the ray of lens-y light he holds. That eye, on the metronome pendulum (a number of objects, e.g. "Perpetual Motif"), on the camera, that eye. Looking.

In one of his films, a woman's face appears in close-up, and staring, eerie eyes peer from her face. Which, in one second, flicker and open, because it was make-up, a masquerade of eyes, painted on her closed eyelids. In this case, when a woman returns an abrupt, wide, disconcerting gaze—Man Ray has "made it" so her eyes were "really" closed all the time. Can women see, or can they not? Do they have the power to look, or is their power elsewhere, inside the dream? The photo is in hush. The dreamed and dreamy dreamer. Man Ray wants to look behind. Man Ray wants especially to look behind the eyes into the dream. Thus into the most private space. And sometimes he wants a woman's comradeship in looking, sometimes not.

"You see, it all amounts to the same thing: do what he will she remains in spite of his greatest doing or not doing the same thing, woman, woman in the abstract, something without a face, something beyond his power—something that (according to his nature) he can abstract, generalize upon, devise means for elucidating."[5]

"Despite depicting two faces, neither figure has a "real" face. Kiki is a mask too. And Kiki is brought to her essence by that mask of her "anti-self"—that so closely resembles her. The dark continent, the woman, the mystery. "Something beyond his power." Did they really believe this kind of rhetoric?

The figures of *Noire et Blanche*—are both without a face; both women are masks, neither gaze forward, neither look out. We understand well enough the mechanisms of female masquerade of inhabiting a beauty by choice and design in order to "pass"—to allow the real work to be done underneath. This is a risky business, and the risk is established in a thin fable by Max Beerbohm in which a mask assumed for charade grew organically to be inseparable from the face. Beauty is a minstrel mask for women.[6]

But a mask is more than a face. It is face not a face, more than a face. Women are masters of the mask. The masquerade. Make-up. Dress-up. The mask resists appropriation while it plays at pleasing. This double portrait is the representation of resistance ("something beyond his power"). The resistance of the dreamer. The resistance of the icon. Is this an image *of* appropriation by

which Man Ray depicts female and African resistance *to* appropriation? This would perhaps explain its power for me.

Research into the fetishes of dream. There is another photograph on which to comment. Man Ray's "Séance du Rêve Eveillé" (Seance of the Wakened Dream, 1924). This is a group of portraits of the surrealists. Eleven people cluster, ten men, one woman. The group is hunched, bunched, intently thinking and listening as Robert Denos, in the lower right corner, holding a die-like cube (dice also figure significantly in Man Ray's films) stares and makes a gesture of explaining. But the photo has a split focus. All eyes and thoughts (Bréton's, Eluard's, Soupault's, de Chirico's) are on the foregrounded Denos, but compositionally the men are grouped around a beautiful woman (Simone Collinet-Breton), who sits at a small table on which there is a typewriter. She is, apparently, in the narrative the photo encapsulates, transcribing what Denos says in his wakened dream. Wanted: secretary to surrealists. Must be able to type dreams, 120 wpm.

It is remarkable (is it unremarkable?) to see the division of labor by gender. The woman is as intent and moved as the men in this group, but she has a further task, and her hands rest on the keyboard, in a helpmeet posture, even as her face, touched, concerned, thoughtful, looks, as do her male comrades, at the object Denos explicates.

Noted without comment:

From a lead feature article in *The Philadelphia Inquirer,* 12 December 1989, about museum shops: "For art lovers who want to be surrounded by meaning, the Philadelphia Museum of Art is selling a $75 transparent shower curtain based on Marcel Duchamp's *Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even.* [¶] It seems that every major museum in America has a gift shop, stocked with inventive and tasteful wares, and. . . ."

Notes

1. The catalogue of the exhibit loosely remarks on "the juxtaposing of Kiki's perfectly shaped white face and the dark, heavily carved African sculpture." "Perfectly" contrasting (curiously) with "heavily." This comment offers only a great loss of specificity by the loose visualization of some generic "African mask," not this one. The observation by Sandra S. Phillips, in the chapter on photography from Merry Foresta, et al., *Perpetual Motif: The Art of Man Ray* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1988), p. 191.
2. Catherine White wrote a paper for me on Gertrude Stein and jazz in which the gods and goods image was recalled. In the conjuncture of materials on appropriation and African-American influences on modernism, I want to acknowledge a dialogue with her.
3. Indeed, the Museum hand-out about the show isolates the moment in the twenties after the rayographs when Ray felt he was "painting" "with light itself." His "triumphant" remark "he had finally succeeded in freeing himself from the 'sticky substance' of paint" gains in resonance when factored through Mira Schor's argument ("Figure/Ground," M/E/A/N/I/N/G 6 [November 1989]) that the codes and substances of oil painting (liquidity, viscousness, goo) involve attitudes to female codes and substances. One has seen other examples of the teens and twenties as crucial moments for the working out of gender narratives in modernism.
4. See a short study by James Clifford which takes up this moment: "Interrupting the Whole," *Conjunctions* 6 (1984): pp. 282–295.
5. William Carlos Williams, "Woman as Operator," in *A Recognizable Image: William Carlos Williams on Art and Artists*, ed. Bram Dijkstra (New York: New Directions, 1978), p. 180.
6. Huston A. Baker, Jr., elucidates the risk of the minstrel mask for African-American artists—because blackface is the sign of the denial of the humanity of African-Americans. Therefore the defining gesture of African-American modernists is "mastering the minstrel mask." *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 15–24. In parallel manner, I am proposing that the mastering of the mask of beauty, a speaking back to beauty, is crucial to female artists, writers, and performers.

Marjorie Welish

Barbara Guest. *Fair Realism.* Sun & Moon, 1989

"Light fingering the empty, open spaces of poetry," said Barbara Guest, speaking last November about the sculpture of the Dadaist Jean (Hans) Arp. In an informal talk at the Poets' House in New York that considered both Arp's chance reliefs and *poésie concrète* still radical today, Guest was glad to linger over the playful and uncompromised radicality of this artist who remained confidently independent of the official office of Surrealism that sought to incorporate him. Of his art's sensible qualities, she stressed its palpable plasticity. And no wonder. That phrase of hers which saw light fingering the poetry of Arp's budded hollows enacted the special open fluidity of Guest's own modernist poetry.

Plasticity of the poetic is evident throughout *Fair Realism,* Guest's most recent—and excellent—book of poems. Descent as gravitational flow is a theme sometimes reflected in design, and even when, as in "The Farewell Stairway *after Balla,"* floating radicals moving through space pay literal homage to the painting of Giacomo Balla, it is rather more for the early pictorial treatment of descent, sparking with expressionistic marks yet otherwise elegantly contained, than to a Futurist maelstrom in which pictorial dynamism will splinter the forms entirely:

> The women without hesitancy began to descend
> leaving flowers—
>
> Ceres harried—bragged of cultivated grain—
>
> > I saw Hecate, the gray-wrapped woman.
> > in lumpy dark.
> >
> > farewell eyes revolve—
> > the frontier oscillating—

pleated moments.
Hades at the bottom—

•

they laughed like twins their arms around each other
the women descending—

Initially, mythic figures move eurythmically across the space of the page. Descent repeats, then repeats again, the theme of flowing movement finding more and more fragmented, gesturally abstract reference. Guest uses gerunds and participles as Gertrude Stein does: to represent perpetual movement yet also to enact the transition from motion into attitude. Her scheme by which anatomy devolves into gesture of attitude and of language helps induce a world of continual incursive passage—as Mary Ann Caws might say—even as we see palpable excursive movement through space.

In *Fair Realism* lyricism is sharply defined by ear. While many of the poems install a condition of floating, fingered space, that is to say, marked sensitivity to the sensible forms indefiniteness takes, testing this atmosphere—indeed, interrogating it—is Guest's precision of language, her rare and exacting intelligence registering and ordering every phoneme. Through syllabic vigilance, lyric becomes acute (a consciousness that other poets of detail confuse with fussiness). As is often the case with Guest, plasticity is subtly reinforced by assonance, the play of vowels creating an aural seamlessness of disjunctive sense. Unmistakable is the series of checks and balances within her lyricism whereby analytic and sensuous impulses startle at every turn.

In this regard, "Ilex" is representatively extraordinary:

From the doorway we watched. Alexander
at the basin washing his face shone
in bottled water from the green doorway.

•

Qu'ad Ashir besieged the iris in bud
blue water with blood camel shackles
then a comet fell said the astrologer
castle emptied yellow bonneted meadow and
bone.

The mountain covered with sharp ilex
locally a spiky plant called holm
Iran heresy like manna
on the giant winged eagle rock

damascened
oasis lily of silk knives Babylonia.

•

His passion for abstraction is gripping—

These cadenced phrases at ease with the ideogrammic sense Pound made standard practice also enjoy a luxuriant yet totally uncompromised Hellenism he would also recognize. Between the publication of her book of poems *Moscow Mansions* in 1973 and *Fair Realism,* a long and arduous bout with biography brought Guest intense familiarity with the life and poetry of H.D., and as a result of writing *Herself Defined: The poet H.D. and her world,* 1984, she does recall that experience in these recent poems. But subject matter aside, one sees in Guest a stylistic dialogue with Pound, Reverdy and Char, among others, that bespeaks a poetics in place ever since The New York School coalesced.

Further on, the poem intermittently detaches itself from reference to Greece to allow for purely aestheticized mental acts:

White daphne Thrace silvered
ghost trained hares in the young snow patches—
lit by fir-cloud risible Danube
where it widens blaze of hunted water at horse teeth

ode grouping
Illyrian sequence—

apprentice oars.

Alexander's 'greatness'—a linnet

"Ilex" exemplifies the poetic adage that beauty is difficult. Here it is painstaking. Guest is not willing to sacrifice musicality to politicized literariness; rather, politics remains an inflection in progressively difficult, because abbreviated, musicality. The space grows most vast around these archipelagoes of phrases.

Kenneth Warren

John Wieners: *Cultural Affairs in Boston: Poetry & Prose 1956–1985.* Edited by Raymond Foye. Preface by Robert Creeley. Black Sparrow Press, 1988. 196 pages. $9.00 paperback, $20.00 hardcover.

The poetry of John Wieners has presented—through the conditions of drifting, dissembling and homelessness—the conflict between radical poetry and social powers. No poet has so absolutely penetrated the confusion of the sexes to impress means for feeling how the battered subject might conceptualize historical, cultural and sexual difference within a poetic framework. Accordingly, from *The Hotel Wentley Poems* (1958) to *Cultural Affairs in Boston: Poetry & Prose 1956–1985* (1988) the full weight of his means has been formed through the years by bodies, flung from crashpads, flophouses, movie theaters and parks into the space that grounds and motivates the poem.

Although Wieners discerned in Edna St. Vincent Millay's poetry a sure sense of musical line and sexually suggestive phrasing, his writing is inevitably linked with *The New American Poetry* (1960). His life among Black Mountain poets especially has been charged with ups and downs. He has studied with Charles Olson and Robert Duncan at Black Mountain College, traveled with Olson to Spoleto to read with Ezra Pound, made a grab for Robert Creeley's thigh, and survived to tell his tale of love for this tribe of men.

Cultural Affairs in Boston plays on a number of possible meanings connected to the force of the gay poet's affairs on culture. Something like a family affair persists through its various social and spiritual manifestations. The poems vary in presentation, offering a series of affairs with father poets, brother poets, movie stars and queens. At the chronological level, the book presents various phases in the poet's life—from junk poems written in his twenties to tongue-in-cheek statements about his accommodation to bachelorhood written in his fifties. Throughout the book a sense of compact information about felt culture registers increasingly from proper names related to formation of capital and culture, so identifying the lasting force of father poets—Pound and Olson—on his world. Conversely, on the maternal side, the conception of the church, with its emphasis on the female body, bears on the major themes of love and sin.

The book begins with a preface by Creeley that seizes upon the social, temporal existence of the poet to suggest a reading better suited to Wieners' earlier lyric character. Perhaps the most telling words in Creeley's preface are Olson's remarks on Wieners: "He's elemental." He writes "a poetry of affect." While Creeley presumes Olson to mean "a poetry that is in the process of a life being lived, literally," these terms

might allow the reader to infer along less existential lines a depth of spirit belonging to the universe of constant companions that seems born of Roman Catholic conviction. Of considerable interest here is the sense in which these terms might be related to the Blessed Virgin, Holy Spirit and Guardian Angel. These spiritual sources have informed Wieners' efforts to write a way out of sexual confusion and found an identity on poetry rather than sex.

The Christmas-time interview that follows, in which Wieners talks about living with the Blessed Virgin and the Holy Spirit, may be viewed as both a beginning and a culmination, the finalization of the Incarnation and the integration of its fecundity into his poetic world. From the interview it becomes possible to discover the spiritual orientation of a poetics that seems antithetical to the operations of not only the Church and St. Augustine but Robert Frost, the Stoics and fertility gods as well. The fruit of all this is the conviction that his poetics is involved with a vision of the Incarnation—the Word, the Spirit, the Virgin's ear. With Mary as queen, his Boston, like some antithetical Heavenly City, is maternalized, turning on the cultivation of inner space. Here is a poet who has found his queen in the mythological system of the Church and restored her to his world.

In his opening invocation, "Hart Crane, Harry Crosby," Wieners calls upon lost, suicidal souls, through whom he envisions companionship:

> Ah, Hart Crane, Crane, Harry Crosby,
> don't run out on me,
> stay with me with me, men,
> build up my shoulderblades.

This tone that derives from Whitman can be heard throughout the first half of the book in poems of restless sexual stirring and wandering. Much to editor Raymond Foye's credit, the device of a full-blown Whitmanic "I" rescues Wieners' lyric fragments from jaws of despair, bringing a sense of fortune and cohesion suited to the demands of the new book form.

About sixteen poems in *Cultural Affairs in Boston* have already appeared, largely the same, in the earlier *Selected Poems* (1972). The only noticeable revision is in "San Francisco, 1958":

> And always these tropical songs call me
> into the south, the lush land
> that I have denied long enough, the
> heat and speed, I now
> embrace, in this yellow flare
> before my eyes.

There is a loss of compression in the shift to the present tense, a loss stemming from the subject's embrace of syntax and sight lines that now lead to a place of paternal authority occupied by Whitman. At a more subjective level, to be discovered later, the recognition of Whitman's self-creative ground suggests a transformative purpose related to a poetics of fluidity and seminal exchange (see John Clarke for his excellent presentation of this subject matter in *From Feathers to Iron: A Concourse in World Poetics* [1978]).

"The poem seizes one, in an experience / almost, all-consuming / as an orgasm," Wieners declares in "An Evocation to Tommy Dorsey." But because of the emotional shape that fluids and stains have inscribed in his psyche, only a secret encounter with the stream of ink that darkens consciousness can bring about poetic knowledge, as in "Steve Magellan-straits":

> Black magician of the night
> dive into the secrets of the sea
> and come up with some golden fish
> to perch on our mantels
> through these long winter months
> so that we may know
> the currents of the inky storm
> to come.

"Memories of You" is the central poem in a strategy to poeticize homoerotic desire in such a way that the space opening up for the poet is the mouth of the reader. Here desire for the penis has already led Wieners to put his mouth in the service of other men. The poem, also to be taken into the mouth, forms his outward thrust in light of the body's modality. The organ of sound that receives the words of the poem thus becomes the receptacle for its fermentation into a unifying force that will ravish men, women and children, awakening them to new identity.

All the old wisdoms have been inverted in a system of belief and articulation that enables the poet to become the locus of feminine contraries—angel and whore:

> Back to trees of Boston and Public Garden,
> where I blew men all night long.
> The stain is still on my face.

Any critical reading of Wieners' poetry has to emphasize how the structure of religious effect, the reversal of love as sin, to borrow Julia Kristeva's insight, informs his longing to become the Lady writing herself

into seminal being. While leading to defilement rather than purification, the mouth's receptivity to seminal exchange has allowed Wieners to become the feminine temptation. To an extraordinary degree, he has devoured the other, faced the stain associated with the woman's body and submitted to its ascension. It's hard to imagine a more explicit telling of defilement. Yet there's wit, in the end, in the inversion of Pound's song of the troubadours, "Cino":

> For I will go to Spoleto and blow them there,
> travel back to San Francisco and blow them there,
> "get fucked in the ass by saintly motorcyclists"
> would it were so; cruise Boston streets again
> with Billy Donahue, pretend it is all peaches and cream
> while I inwardly scream and dream of the day
> when I will be free
> to marry
> and breed more children
> so I can seduce them
> and they be seduced by
> motorcyclists in the dawn.

If Harold Bloom comes anywhere near making sense in saying that "a poem is always the other man, the precursor, and so a poem is always a person, always the father of one's Second Birth," then this cruise poem, with its exchange of semen, might be the furthest possible embodiment of Bloom's theory. In the expansion of the poetic universe, the image of a burst of semen, developed in Whitman's "Spontaneous Me," and suggested in Pound's "Cino," now extends from "Memories of You" over these poet fathers to give even Bloom's work a new gloss. Here, too, the vision of the seminal exchange, in accordance with Clarke's analysis of creative life, increases the value of Wieners' "poetic corpus." In the literal sense, this increase rests on the advance of Wieners' own seminal principle—"the stain"—over Whitman's "limpid liquid" over Pound's "clouds that are spray to its sea."

Divisions are important to Wieners: speaking and listening, the living and the dead, masculine and feminine. He writes in "Preface":

> Verse making is more than a continuum of principle resting on feminine phenomenological apprehension. The real one of many, the illusory far and near intersect to push behaviour's stream, dependent on questing, producing revelatory postures for men, animals and stars.

The poet is one pastor of this distribution between two visions. Often he must struggle against the story of the Incarnation, to hear "the right voice" so that his reception, unlike the Virgin's, will be identified with death rather than life:

> I know now I heard you speak in the night.
> Voices of dead loves past,
>
> whisper instructions over the electric air.
>
> O words that confirm and chain.
>
> Down deep the path's final entrance reveals itself.
> The will draws strong on the palm of the hand.
>
> Do not tamper with the message here.
>
> ("Sickness")

The collection as a whole reveals how strongly the deaths of poets have affected Wieners. After the death of Frank O'Hara female subjects come to dominate the poems. References become more elliptical, as in "Adult, To His Inspiration," with Olson's passing from life into the constellation of "a calla-lily easter / the kyrie orizen." As time goes by his means of organizing the image shifts from line to film. "Poetry remains such taste of one man for his other / through cinema," he writes in 1974, no longer under Olson's influence.

Film's store of perceptual identity imposes a shift in how Wieners regards himself, especially in the bearing of female character traits capable of generating a difference in his self-image. In terms of his poetics, film might be understood as an extension of "feminine phenomenological apprehension." Ordinary fascination with Hollywood stars can become for Wieners a symbolic order that eventually displaces the poet as subject. At times his subjection to these figures is solipsistic. But his poetic universe offers itself as an accessible constellation to the reader who will accept the proper name of Bette Davis as designating the unmoved mover in a sometimes campy cosmos. She is a goddess, after all, who must remain unresponsive to the mortal poet's desire for possession of her divine qualities:

> . . .Just think, 66 years in the theatre, 66 years of human living flesh and blood, against the onslaught of time, ravages of inhuman war, disease, famine and death. 60

years, a visionary magnet to millions in attributes of suffering attainment, before this temple shrine of purity goodness, and rankling, blubbery humour. I have loved Bette Davis, always, ever since I was a little boy. . .

(from "To My Chicago Friends and Publishers")

Neither discrete nor subject to Hollywood domination, stars effect links to a poetic world in which Pound and Olson generate sexual difference, a difference capable of moving the reader beyond any simple regard or dismissal for the manifestation of camp. Together poetic figures interpenetrate with those of film to illustrate the lengths to which this poet has gone in order to stage the recovery of his lover.

The uncanny feature of Wieners' poetic world is the realization that the spirit of revolt must push against the war of the sexes, in order that new meaning might issue from the age old vision of a woman's soul confined in a man's body:

spill the last word Mata, over Hanoi Hanna
so you can turn your back on Tokyo Iva,

and look the German Axis square in the eye
backward picking up Brocades' hem
then douse the lights, ah
well,. . .the moon comes up—.

(from "After you go in the dark room")

Cultural Affairs in Boston, with only about a half dozen pieces from *Behind the State Capitol or Cincinnati Pike* (1975); manages to indicate the contribution that Wieners has made to the postmodern swing in disposition toward the relation of writing to the body, cinema, gender identity, politics, and property. Today he is the clearest link between the dispositions of Black Mountain and Language writing as well. Perhaps it has always been so, but between 1972 and 1985, while Language writing was taking hold for a new generation of poets, the decidedly experimental cast of *Behind the State Capitol or Cincinnati Pike* seemed bizarre—at least in comparison with the earlier lyrical efforts gathered in *Selected Poems* (1972)—and his exhilarating sense of desire for poets seemed pushed by radical experiment to the limit of good sense. Now that Language writing has gained rather widespread critical currency it is obviously time to place his schizzy turn in the context of recent literary history. The writing from *Behind the State Capitol or Cincinnati Pike* be-

comes, in the retrospective context, the pivotal 1970s text of experimental writing, anticipating the broader critical acceptance of any number of Language writers for discontinuous prose of multiple, clairvoyant, and hysterical voices.

Certainly, *Cultural Affairs in Boston* qualifies on all accounts, according to Charles Bernstein's definition, as a "multi-discourse," which presents "politics, autobiography, fiction, philosophy, common sense, song, etc." But neither language nor the totality of a reader's association is the subject of this writing. What must be granted, in the end, as the seminal, shameful, subjective factor is Wieners himself, struggling with language to occupy the position of the femme fatale whose signs have been inscribed in his psyche. Implicit in practically every piece is the physical demand that the reader accept the neural connections that support his deep psychic layers. More than some fey, queenly language game Wieners' expressions of gender identity seem to push out—as a matter of hormones—from its probable physical location in the limbic system of the brain's temporal lobe—to lay claim to the seeds of a poetic seizure that is rooted deep and wide in these cultural affairs.

Tyrus Miller

Leslie Scalapino. *Way*. San Francisco, North Point Press. $12.00

Readers familiar with Leslie Scalapino's earlier books will recognize the poetic terrain of her long poem *Way*: the alienated West Coast cityscapes, the detached yet anxious "I" slipping in and out of focus, the serial composition, and the array of "notational devices" lending typographical shape to the poems. Her latest work, however, achieves a degree of integration and economy of means not found in her previous two collections, *Considering how exaggerated music is* (1982) and *that they were at the beach* (1985). Through formal ingenuity and subtle internal patterning, *Way* negotiates the Scylla and Charybdis of the contemporary long poem. It avoids a mere insistence on the unity of heterogeneous material through the book's mechanical form. Yet it also retains an openness that keeps its materials in play in its radical departure from traditional narrative form and presentation.

The poem begins to establish its themes and structure before the reader even opens the book: its two cover photos, taken together, form a

relevant "preface." On the left is a picture (the caption tells us) of a couple dancing in a bar: a man hunched over a woman, her arm draped over his shoulder, a hint of alcohol in the blurry outlines of their bodies. Juxtaposed to it on the right is a street scene: "men fighting on sidewalk." In a striking coincidence of posture with the dancers, a bare-chested man hoists up his adversary and holds him suspended horizontal to the ground. The arms of the lifted man wrap, almost tenderly, around the other man's shoulders. The dominant "partner" supports the lifted man's head and encircles his spread crotch. The dancers are seen from the side, the fighters frontally, as if the difference between an erotic embrace and an act of violence were only a variation in the perspective of the frame. The analogous configurations of bodies establish through their juxtaposition a single photo-*graphic:* an ideogram presenting two related, through irreducible modes of social being.

Similar to this semiotic charging of the normally marginal cover space, the titling of the series presents a schematized version of the recursions and delays that characterize the temporality of the poem as a whole. Thus, "Way" is both the title of the whole poem and the second section of the book. The first section, the "Later Floating Series," includes as its third subsection "The floating series." The "original" series are thus hierarchically and temporally subordinated to their successors: echoes precede their sources. The "Later Floating Series" is, of the two major series, the more extensive and formally complex. It consists of four subsections, which for sake of clarity I'll call minor series: "walking by," "bum series," "The floating series," and "Delay series." Subdivisions proliferate further in the body of these poems. The minor series "walking by," for instance, splits in three, the title section, a section entitled "Fragment," and a third called "End Part." "Way" (the major series) is somewhat simpler, consisting of two minor series: "no(h)-setting" and "hoofer," the latter having a first and second subdivision.

It is necessary to be this meticulous in my description of *Way*'s formal design because much of its meaning resides in the patterns of transformation of a limited amount of material. In spite of the transparent representations of some of Scalapino's lines—her evocation of Oakland in "cranes are on the / skyline," for example—these concrete references don't really form the center of gravity of the poems. Instead, the emphasis falls on the *relation* of things, persons, and events, which tend to be introduced at a high level of abstraction: "the man," "a city," "the public figure," and the like. For these relations, textual devices serve as "metaphors," bringing an insistent intertextuality into play. I don't mean, however, allusions, but rather references to other *forms* of discourse. Photographs, scenes from television, diaries (Scalapino has written on Japanese poetic diaries), the notation of Mallarme's uncompleted *Tomb for*

Anatole, the ellipses of objectivist poetry, the grammaticalism of Gertrude Stein, and the typographical quirkiness of Emily Dickinson are among the most evident points of reference. These signify, over and above the designated content of the words, the possibility of a communication as such: an "intercourse" between sealed vessels, a transgressive opening also instanced by sexual acts, physical or verbal acts of violence, and moments of powerful emotion when the autonomy of the self is breached.

Scalapino typically introduces a few motifs, clusters of thematic materials, most often not directly linked to one another: fragmentary narratives from past and present, descriptions of spaces, remembered contacts with people that seem emotionally fraught beyond their manifest content. These motifs then recur with variations and begin to mingle. The relations slowly unfold through repetition and permutation, inflecting each element with subjective value and consciousness. Particularly in the major series "Way," the interpenetration of motifs becomes extremely dense as they follow in quick succession, interrupting and fragmenting one another: "being the same—the—wanting to disturb / boys—or men—having deliberately / shouted or called—at night—so / there's no way to be weary—though me actually / sleeping—as their sound."

Here and there, in my opinion, Scalapino fails to illuminate sufficiently the relations governing her materials. At times she withholds so much that the significance is lost. This is the case when her ellipses becomes so deep as to preclude further questioning: "it was during the war—so it wouldn't have done any good to show anger." In other places, a motif remains so distant from the others as to fall outside the relations the series establishes. In "The floating series," for example, the singular appearance of a policeman's immolation by a crowd, probably South Africa, seems motivated only by the shock value of its juxtaposition with the erotic scene dominating this minor series. At its best, however, as in "bum series," Scalapino's juggling of autonomous motifs allows the revelation of the links between the atomized compartments of urban existence: the writing "I" in relation to the dead bums, the industrial machines hulking in the skyline, the narcissism of a man in new wave attire, the current president, and the social struggle abroad.

A passage from the first minor series, "walking by" of the "Later Floating Series," exemplifies Scalapino's rigor in unearthing the temporal complexity of any single event. She disaggregates its components into a sum of vectors, momentarily converging: "I was in school; the bus driver seeing a girl crossing the street hadn't stopped—she'd been hit—so the other students—the boys—would hit the side of the bus everyday." The event and its symbolic repetition, the quotidian fact of being in school and the irruption of chance into that continuum, the linear progress of the bus and girl and the violent hiatus of their contact: all these Scalapino com-

pacts into a single brief passage. Near the end of "walking by," she notes the investment of subjectivity in any "objective" event and indicates that the complex time she has registered is the lived time of the subject, the writing "I." Time, thus, is for her always an intersection of events and desire: "later—events set in terms of chronology—which may be earlier in time, but emotionally are of a later age."

Although the social tableaux that Scalapino presents are harsh and bleak—portraying bullying cops, mentally disturbed bus riders, bums frozen to death, muggers, betraying friends and lovers—she refrains from direct moral commentary. Her judgments are instead displayed in their most immediate form: as traces left by subjective involvement in perceived events and in those recalled in memory. In this respect, Scalapino's work extends an already long tradition of modernist writing which, after Bergson, sought to restore the intensive duration of temporal flux to the dead and deadening shell of habitual life. The language of poetry may at once facilitate this restoration and threaten it, by its own settling into habit. This ambiguity of language's nature may account for the ambivalences of Scalapino's tone, oscillating between disingenuous innocence and cool, defensive abstraction.

A final feature in which Scalapino follows her modernist predecessors (including Bergson) is in her appeal to the metaphors of "modern science": relativity, quantum theory, dynamics. In *that they were at the beach,* she used the analogy of the "aeolotropic series," referring to the exhibition of different properties when the perspective of observation is varied. In *Way,* she seems to press beyond this formal analogy to suggest a more substantive relation between the scientific ensemble and the social scenes she presents. She quotes a long passage from David Bohm's *Causality and Chance in Modern Physics,* discussing the "qualitative infinity of nature," the relativity of objects in time and space. After an ellipsis, she quotes a conclusion which to my mind protests too much: ". . .we admit also that nevertheless there still exists an absolute, unique, and objective reality." What is in store for the reader of the poem itself, however, would seem to contradict this assertion. Its relation to the poem verges on an ideological absorption of the social into the natural, a nature stabilized by the social authority of science. It is as if Scalapino had recognized the brink of contingency to which her poetry had carried her and absconded for a last grab at faith: the uncertain certainty of a relative path, a meandering way, a "Tao of physics" in place of a dead God.

Rothenberg:

My desk today is covered with five volumes of Kurt Schwitters—*Das Literarische Werk* that Dumont Verlag brought out in Germany in the early 1970s. Something near 2000 pages that makes a life work comparable—both as conceived & realized—to what he did so beautifully as painter & collagist. I expect to cull & translate 300 pages for a "selected poetry & other writings"—by summer's end if lucky—but with a sense too that the domain of poetry (the field in which we work & live) is sadly out of touch with works like his. I would say, anyway, to start these noticings, that if you have some German at your disposal & an interest in viewing an experimental poetics as wide-ranging in its forms as any of that time, then *Das Literarische Werk* (one book of poetry as such, two books of "prose," one theater, one manifesto) is still available to take a look at.

Speaking of selecting, then, there is a virtual subgenre today of *selected* (sometimes *collected) poems* that someone might someday write about. Functioning like retrospectives in the art world sense, they occur somewhere around mid-career (but often earlier), pulling together & representing older works that have been published here & there along the way. For an active poet they may happen more than once (four times at least in my own case), & in the process one may feel oneself to be (again) a juggler & collagist. For myself, as a reader, such gatherings are almost always useful—as an instance of self-selection or reflection on the poet's part & as a compact way of carrying a sampler of the work around. The drawback is the necessity of omissions & the uneasy sense that what drops out is not so easily restored; the tradeoff, where it works, is in the clarity, the force of the conjunctions.

Three such works have very recently come in: Armand Schwerner's latest *Tablets I–XXVI* (London: Atlas Press, 1989), Pierre Joris's *Breccia:*

Selected Poems 1972–1986 (Luxembourg: Editions Phi, and New York: Station Hill Press), and Anne Waldman's *Helping the Dreamer: New & Selected Poems 1966–1988* (Minneapolis: Coffee House Press, 1989). Schwerner's of course is not a selection from the entire oeuvre (something like that came earlier with *Sounds of the River Naranjana* in 1986) but the latest version of his ongoing masterwork, *The Tablets*—the equivalent, in Schwerner's terms, of *Paterson* or *Maximus*. The principal addition here is the short Tablet XXV & the extensive Tablet XXVI, which introduces a range of visual/verbal "pictographic" elements followed by an extraordinary twenty pages of commentary & pseudo-translation. The inclusion of *The Tablets* in the series of surrealist & French-based books published by Atlas Press also results in Schwerner's presence alongside Jarry, Breton, Soupault, Leiris, Queneau, Roussel, etc.—an indication of the international, not merely American company of which he's surely now a part.

Pierre Joris's *Breccia,* this one a genuine selected poems, is a further instance of what we can now recognize as the unboundedness of (for lack of a better word) the *postmodern*. It's not only the work of a poet who comes into the American language from elsewhere (-in this instance Luxembourg) but of one who carries with him the markers of where he's from & where he's been (either in person or in acts of mind alone). It seems to me, in reading Joris, that Olson's localism (& Olson is surely a major teacher here) sometimes disguised that other *global* reach of *Maximus,* say, to make us forget too often that without the latter the former can be reduced to a sentimental, even dangerous refusal to be implicated in a larger world. Which is to say, that Joris escapes this much as Olson did & that he blesses the adopted language with a work that opens that language to the world at large; in short, that he becomes a poet & a teacher on his own.

Since Joris until recently has largely written from outposts distant from America (London, Paris, and Algeria most notably), *Breccia* may come as a surprise to those reading it here: the first fully visible appearance of a major active poet. Waldman's "new & selected," on the other hand, marks the fulfillment of what has been an amply visible work spun out across two decades. Since Waldman is a strong, sometimes glamorous performer of that work, it may not be apparent to those who catch her on the run that the poems as a totality present, like Joris's & Schwerner's, a multiphasic picture of the world—a merge of many histories, of places & personas on a global scale. Two quotes on the back cover of *Helping the Dreamer* catch the double impact of the work: Allen Ginsberg's stress on her achievement as "a poet orator, her body. . .an

instrument for vocalization" and Patricia Hampl's pointing to the efficacy of the poems "not when they perform, but when they ponder and reflect." It's probably superfluous to say—as with others in this genre—that the cumulative effect of the gathering is a sense of scope beyond that of the earlier poems or series of poems in isolation. It is a big work in all these instances—the movement from a kind of early desperation to a posture that can now embrace the world.

San Diego
16 January 1990

Coolidge:

"She also enjoyed the adventure of killing huge brilliant animals." (James Fox, *White Mischief)*
"I set out to dismember language / but went too far / and now myself am spoken" (Robert Kelly, *The Flowers of Unceasing Coincidence)*
"Supposing a neckline in touch with an element of desire penetrates the cloud on a postage stamp." (George Tysh, *Propositions: Aire)*
"The skating-rink organ produced a sound that made him think of total death." (Don DeLillo, *Libra)*
"PO: (whispering) I want some rest. I saw that dome again." (Budd Hopkins, *Missing Time)*
"The teenager onstage blew a perfect smoke ring out of her vagina. 'Pussy blow fractals!' the Australian yelled." (Peter Straub, *Koko)*
"Sometimes I try to sound like car motors or the continuous cracking of glass." (Sonny Murray, in Valerie Wilmer, *As Serious As Your Life)*
"so it is death is the / condition of infinite form—" (Robin Blaser, *Syntax)*
"The trees are branching between minerals." (Lyn Hejinian, *The Cell)*
"on we went again into the silence, along empty reaches round the still bends, between the high walls of our winding way" (Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness)*
"A heap of broken images, where the sun beats" (T.S. Eliot, *The Waste Land)*
"Fortunately one draws no conclusions, since everything is far too real to be able to mean anything." (Paul Bowles on mescaline, in Christopher Sawyer-Lauçanno, *An Invisible Spectator)*
"Time is the solo of space" (Merrill Gilfillan, *River Through Rivertown)*
"Everything is material to the material." (Glenn Gould, in Otto Friedrich, *Glenn Gould / A Life and Variations)*

"One thing is only a mode of another." (Leslie Scalapino, *The Return of Painting)*

"Bebop had syncopated eighth notes, a very subtle triplet feeling." (Carla Bley, interview in *Jazz* magazine)

"Sometimes he spoke aloud, but it was not satisfying; it seemed rather to hold back the natural development of the ideas. They flowed out through his mouth, and he was never sure whether they had been resolved in the right words. Words were much more alive and more difficult to handle, now; so much so that Kit did not seem to understand them when he used them. They slipped into his head like the wind blowing into a room, and extinguished the frail flame of an idea forming there in the dark. Less and less he used them in his thinking." (Paul Bowles, *The Sheltering Sky)*

"Language turns out to be the content of the world, not its structure. It is completely plastic; it is no longer possible to hold part of it back—as a method—to create a shape for the remainder." (Don Byrd, *Language Poetry, 1971–1986)*

"Invent, invent wildly, paying no attention to connections, till it becomes impossible to summarize. A simple relay race among symbols, one says the name of the next, without rest. To dismantle the world into a saraband of anagrams, endless. And then believe in what cannot be expressed. Is this not the true reading of the Torah? Truth is the anagram of an anagram. Anagrams = ars magna." (Umberto Eco, *Foucault's Pendulum)*

"it would give me another vehicle, a vehicle of content" (Eva Hesse, in Lucy Lippard, *Eva Hesse)*

"Are there enough meanings of myself for me to stop" (Arkadii Dragomoshchenko, *The Numerically Second Elegy)*

"The man who set out again had only an unfinished book for luggage." (Edmond Jabes, *The Book of Shares)*

Dec. 1989

Eshleman:

Along with Arlette Leroi-Gourhan and Jacques Allain's *Lascaux inconnu* (Paris: NRF, 1979), an extremely detailed examination of the some 1500 engravings in the cave, *The Cave of Lascaux/The Final Photographs,* by Mario Ruspoli (NYC: Abrams, 1987) is probably the most complete and up-to-date book on the most beautiful and haunting of the Upper Paleolithic cave "sanctuaries." Lascaux was sealed in 1963 for crucial restoration, and is today "open" in a very restricted way: four days a

week, five people (approved by the authorities in Bordeaux) are allowed in for 45 minutes. In 1981–83, the prehistorian and television producer, Mario Ruspoli, filmed and photographed Lascaux with a six-man team who called themselves "Lascaux-nauts." Excellent photographs, with considerable background information (climate, fauna, flora, etc.).

Ajit Mookerjee, the author of several lavishly-illustrated and informative books on Tantrik art, has brought out a short monograph on *Kali: The Feminine Force* (Rochester, VT: Destiny Books, 1988). I read his text in company with chapters on Kali from Barbara Walker's *The Crone* and her *The Skeptical Feminist*. Taken as a triad, these texts make Kali available as a psychologically-understandable, dynamic power in all of our lives.

There is a unique, personal animism in the poetry and prose of Peter Redgrove that makes him for me the most engaging English poet writing today. Some American publisher should make the range of his writing available here. Recent titles include: *Poems 1954–1987* (Penguin Books, 1989), *The Black Goddess* (Grove Press, 1988), and *The First Earthquake* (Secker and Warburg, 1989).

August Kleinzahler has become the master of what might very fairly be identified as "the Kleinzahler poem," a gritty, things-of-this-world, heart-felt, sound-sensitive lyric. *Earthquake Weather* (Mount Kisco, NY: Moyer Bell Ltd., 1989) is his most definitive collection and as such raises a new question: where does he go from here?

Of somewhat the same ilk as Kleinzahler, William Corbett's poetry, with tints of Objectivism, Creeley, and Philip Guston's sensibility, has never been more handsomely presented than in *On Blue Note* (Cambridge: Zoland Books, 1989—there is also a boxed edition including a Corbett cassette). As a fairly new publisher, Zoland is to be congratulated for offering us this distinguished collection.

We are always discovering new contemporaries, with some embarrassment realizing that our first engagement with someone happens to be in his fifth or sixth book. This happened to me with Charles North's *The Year of the Olive Oil* (Brooklyn: Hanging Loose, 1989). Having clear affinities with O'Hara, Schuyler, and Padgett, North's volume displays a fully-formed sensibility, darty, thoughtful and humorous. I am still finding my way in his work, but I'd like to salute it as a genuine presence.

Two first books by quite young writers (I think): Alison Bunday writes "fictions" *A Bad Business* (Providence: Lost Roads, 1985), carefully conceived, parable-like, forays into characters and events she imagines, sets forth, and quickly abandons, often at exactly the right moment. Susan Yarrow's *Believing in the World / a reference work* (Vancouver: Tsunami Editions, 1989) is deft, notational poetry/prose interchange, with

Language Poetry associations, but also with affinities to the work of Francis Ponge.

The Basil Bunting Poetry Archive (established at Durham University, and currently appealing for funds) has published Bunting's only written statement on his longest, most famous poem, *Briggflatts, A Note on Briggflatts*. Eight pages, $5. For copies, as well as for more information on the Archive, write to The Secretary, Basil Bunting Poetry Archive, Durham University Library, Palace Green, Durham DH1 3RN, England.

Sulfur readers will recall the Hungarian section in #21, including a prose poem and two short essays by Sándor Csoóri. Corvina in Budapest has published Csoóri's *Barbarian Prayer* (Selected Poems), which is available outside Hungary via Kultura, Budapest 62, POB 149, H-1389, Hungary. Csoóri is a witness, in the grand, solemn sense of that word, an honest man obsessed with several decades of the spiritual and political situation of his country. He has often been in political disgrace, with books suspended and writings banned. I met him at the Budapest home of Gyula Kodolyani and Maria Illyes in 1986, and his presence has remained with me to this day. The extraordinary photo of Csoóri on the cover of the book makes all introductions sound like stuttering.

The University Press of Virginia has started a new series of Caribbean and African Literature Translated from the French that should be of interest to many *Sulfur* readers. Titles in the CARAF BOOKS series so far include: *Faces of African Independence,* three plays by Guillaume Oyônô-Mbia and Seydou Badian; *Snares without End,* by Olympe Bhèly-Quénum; *Tropical Circle,* by Alioum Fantouré; *The Madman and the Medusa,* by Tchicaya U Tam'Si; *The Bastards,* by Bertène Juminer; *Caribbean Discourse,* by Edouard Glissant; and *Lone Sun,* Daniel Maximin. Forthcoming titles include *Lyric and Dramatic Poetry 1946–1982,* by Aimé Césaire; and the *Collected Poetry of LS Senghor.* A. James Arnold is the General Editor; Kandioura Drame, the Associate Editor.

This past fall, Allen Weiss sent me several issues of a Melbourne magazine, *Art & Text* (American office: Box 325, Prince Street Station, NYC 10012). Two of the four issues I have seen are "special issues": #18 Phantasm and Simulcra / The Drawings of Pierre Klossowski, and #27 Art Brut / Madness and Marginalia. The other two issues contain "Right of Inspection," a long essay by Marie-Françoise Plissart and Jacques Derrida, and under the concept "Burnout," an interview with Michel Foucault, and an essay by Meaghan Morris on Postmodernity and Lyotard's Sublime.

Lastly, another magazine, now in its 2nd issue: *Raw Vision,* "The New International Journal of Outsider Art, Art Brut, Grassroots Art, Visionary Art" (American office: Dept 193, 1202 Lexington Ave., NYC 10028). Both of these magazines are in the process of re-conceiving Art Brut, which,

given a larger overview, appears to be a genuine aspect of International Modernism, and not merely real-art-approximations by the naive and the mad. As we approach the end of the century, it may turn out to be one the most crucial manifestations of 19th and 20th century imagination.

Bernstein:

The Collected Poems of Sterling Brown selected by Michael S. Harper. (Evanston: TriQuarterly Books/Another Chicago Press). At last back in print & for the first time in paperback. The formal & conceptual innovations of this work make it vital for understanding still underexplored aspects of the "second wave" of radical modernists born at the century's turn. Brown's project reflects an ethnographic commitment to found an "american" poetry rooted in the work songs, blues, and vernacular speech of African-Americans. It is akin to the poetry of Reznikoff, Hughes, and Williams in its radical reimaging/resounding of both the prosody and social orientation of contemporary literary practice. "When I oughta be quiet, / I is got a itch": for which we all can be grateful.

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Cancer Daybook & Back in the USA by Wystan Curnow (Auckland: Van Guard Xpress, Black Light Books; available for $9 each from UCSD Bookstore, La Jolla, CA 92093). Long-delayed, these are most-welcome first two collections of poetry by one of New Zealand's most interesting writers—who is, as well, art critic, co-editor of *Splash,* eloquent professor of "american" poetry. From his book-length meditation on his bout with colon cancer: "Cut // it / out // cut / it // out."

*

The Motion of Light in the Water: Sex and Science Fiction in the East Village, 1957–1965 by Samuel R. Delany (New York: Arbor House [cloth], New American Library [paper]). A vivid, marvelously quirky memoir of the black, gay science fiction writer's first day at high school (we both went to Bronx Science), his dinner with Auden, & many other things, with sections numerated à la Wittgenstein's *Tractatus.* Delany has done some of the best writing on genre: *The Jewel-Hinged Jaw* is one of the best essay collections of the 1970s. In this new book, he continues to explore the interrelationships between fiction, politics, poetry, sex, memory, imagination, autobiography, & speculation. This is a work not only of social vision but also of a social visionary.

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Shadowed Dreams: Women's Poetry of the Harlem Renaissance, edited by Maureen Honey (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press). One of the least-known aspects of the poetry of the first half of this century is the work of African-American women poets. "The Harlem Renaissance" is only part of that story; this collection is limited to poems published between 1918–1931, mostly in *The Crisis & Opportunity,* two leading periodicals of the "New Negro Movement," & in the several period anthologies of Black writing. This body of work is simply not available outside shorter presentations in a few still-available anthologies (Johnson, Bontemps, Randall). Honey publishes 148 poems by 34 poets, most notably Helene Johnson (1907–?), Anne Spencer (1882–1975), Gwendolyn Bennett (1902–1981), & Mae Cowdery (1909–1953). Evidently, Johnson was lost track of by the mid-1960s—it's one of the not infrequent disturbing facts Honey reports; meanwhile the *Norton Modern* dropped her from its much expanded, "ethnically diverse" second edition despite that, in the first edition, she was the only Black woman from the pre-War period. Honey includes three unpublished poems by Spencer, the only previously unpublished poems in the anthology. Cowdery's selection includes a striking series of homoerotic poems, not found in the standard anthologies, reprinted from her book, *We Lift Our Voices and Other Poems*—one of the only books of poetry published by one of these writers. —Overall, the style of the "Women's Poetry of the Harlem Renaissance" is less "innovative" than Hughes or Toomer, Stein or Loy; but the social being of these works (not to be confused with content) is plenty radical & the most resourceful of these poets make cracks in the false-front impermeability of English verse with the tools at hand: a poly-american poetic know-how worth attending to, closely.

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Collected Works of Velimer Khlebnikov, volume II: *Prose, Plays, and Supersagas,* translated by Paul Schmidt, edited by Ronald Vroom (Harvard University Press). Amazing: Schmidt's supersaga of translation continues; volume III, the poems, will complete the set (volume I, *Letters and Theoretical Writings,* was published in 1987). "Khlebnikov (1885–1922) ranks with Mallarmé, Joyce, Pound, and Stein among the great innovators of literary modernism. He blurred the distinctions between verse and prose and between one literary genre and another. His experiments helped to break the hold of traditional verse patterns in Russian poetry, as he worked with irregularities, unequal line lengths, meters that varied from line to line in a single poem, variable stanza lengths, irregular rhyme patterns. He made use of patterns and tropes from folklore and from

chants, incantations, and shamanistic language. He managed to create an entire poetics [of] neologisms, palindromes, riddles, puns. And, under the same influence that led Pound to the *Cantos,* he invented the supersaga, a new genre capable of containing the diverse elements of the universe that determine human history"—from Schmidt's introduction.

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Reading Zukofsky's 80 Flowers by Michelle Leggott (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press). The most exhaustive (& sometimes exhausting, mind-boggling) account of Zukofsky's compositional méthod, this over 400-page study of the multiple sources for LZ's last 82-page completed work (1974–1978), with special reference to the penultimate movements of *"A",* is an awesome tribute to the hypercondensation & hyperconductivity of LZ's later poetry by a young poet & luminously meticulous scholar from Auckland who received her doctorate from the University of British Columbia in the mid-80s.

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The Collected Poems of Jean Toomer edited by Robert B. Jones & Margery Toomer Latimer (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press). Toomer is the same generation as Zukofsky & Brown, born the same year (1894) as Reznikoff. This is the first edition to make available Toomer's early unpublished or uncollected poems, plus his virtually unknown post-*Cane* poetry (which makes up over half of this 100-page collection). Under the influence of Gurdjieff, the poems of the mid-20s & 30s are often bland and sappy in their new age spiritualism, ***avant la lettre***. But the short set of poems at the end of the book, mostly from the late 30s & 40s, are startling Zen/Quaker prayers that have some of the same shimmering energy as his earlier poems: "It was perhaps no accident / that drove me smash against this earth / And caused friction just enough / To fuse me with the planet's dust."

Welish:

Empathy by Mei-Mei Berssenbrugge. (Barrytown, NY: Station Hill Press, 1989.) Somewhere in the silvery spaciousness of atmospheric perspective is a human being observing the play of light on dust particles and from this construing directionality and her orientation in relation to the sun. Poem after poem, in lines long and unprepossessing in their generic diction, Mei-Mei Berssenbrugge brings cosmic neutrality into focus, locates

herself within it, and further, situates herself on an empirical/psychological frontier or membrane (much like that biological membrane fascinating to the poet in *Random Possession,* 1979) through which phenomenal fact nourishes the entire sentient and thinking human organism. ("My feeling was not mystical but conjectural. / Its naturalism is an authentic source of pathos, delicate and precise, / but it is not good manners to him." From "Naturalism.") A fine book.

Empty Places by Laurie Anderson. (New York Premiere, Brooklyn Academy of Music, October 3–15, 1989.) For those of us who remember her post-minimal performances at The Whitney Museum of American Art in the 1970s, Laurie Anderson has long ago abandoned the art form she helped create. It's true that she insinuates disturbing material into the consciousness of adolescent mall mentality, with charm—perhaps too much charm, and wit—decidedly leaning on wit, with her political pop songs. But the most provocative material lands in the interstices between songs ("Do the unborn have rights? Yes, because they can thank you later."); in effect, content occurs in spoken arias giving way to thin, sung recitative. The public voice of Sonny Bono, the semiotics of Reagan offer empty places of promise which often foreclose on their implication. This is performance art only insofar as Anderson presents the cuts from her new album in a media realization on stage.

Rasula:

Shahen-Shah by Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan—Qawwal and Party (Realworld recording 91300-1)
"Qawwali" is the devotional utterance of divinity in ecstatic Sufism, and this recording of Nusrat and his Pakistani compatriots is an incomparable exposure to the trance of the music, and an open invitation to the ritual convulsions beyond and within it. Most arresting in Nusrat's vocal style is his propensity to grapple with the Phonetic Fruit in what is most accurately described as *scat,* of a rare vigor and intricacy.

Sahel by Sona Diabate & M'mah Sylla (Triple Earth recording Terra 106)
The singers and their instrumentalists are from the all-women band "Les Amazones de Guinée." The rhythmic knitting of acoustic guitars (almost exclusively plucked) and marimbas forward the curious restraint of voice, over which arboreal flutes slant, making way most memorably for the woody/reedy sinuosity of alto and soprano saxophones which testify to some unforgettable transmission of the Bechetian impulse, back to Africa,

lending dignity to a variety of songs (including such gems as an homage to the Hafia soccer club).

– *Djam Leelii* by Baaba Maal & Mansour Seck (Rogue recording FMSL 2014)
The Senegalese singer Youssou N'Dour has been justifiably lionized abroad, but this disc throws open the shutters to another if allied world of folk-style vocal convictions; an irreparable sadness lurking at the heart of the music is brought forward in the stark tonalities of acoustic guitars, balafon, all minimalized to accentuate what can only be called the *blues* of Senegal. Simple wail of earthly creatures.

– *Peer Gynt* by Pierre Dørge and New Jungle Orchestra (Olufsen recording DOC 5094)
Dørge's always news—throughout the 1980s his has been *the* jazz ensemble to watch, worldwide—but this is something else again. Record sleeve notes are sparse, but this would seem to be music accompanying a performance of (Ibsen's?) *Peer Gynt* in Copenhagen early in 1989. Anyway, a rich soundscape in which the rhythms remain African (along with the instruments: djembe, kempli, gangsa, bata, etc.) while the spectral dark spots of Nordic soul are increasingly exposed by the leader's guitar, and as always evocatively lured on by Morten Carlsen and John Tchicai's saxophonic thickets. Blues in the land of the midnight sun: supple, hiphoppety, and decidedly scary.

Real Presences by George Steiner (University of Chicago Press)
The fluent and idiomatic multiculturalism of Steiner's style and address makes him sound pedantic—which is unfortunate, because his eloquent lucidities are a welcome counterweight to the predominant jargoniferous life-forms spawned in academia. Here Steiner concentrates all the rhetorical skill at his disposal to combat the spectre of deconstruction (an absolutely futile approach for anyone less honeytongued). Mystery inheres in presence, not absence, he argues, exposing (he thinks) the unreflective nihilism of the Derridean critique of presence. Fortunately, in mounting his argument, Steiner plays a consummate devil's advocate: his eloquence is applied as assiduously in representing his opponent's point of view as his own. His descriptions of linguistic instability are especially fetching. We're compelled to exercise judgment, he claims, in view of the "licentious genius" of language, which subjects all utterance to infinite deferral and ultimate disrepair. Steiner makes of deconstruction a consummately Dostoyevskyan project in which "*anything* can be said," in which "the anarchic ubiquity of possible discourse" contaminates all discursive relations. Language becomes a viral agent, and "the 'otherness' which enters into us makes us other." The value of Steiner's book is its

eloquent humanizing of the pathological antihumanism of deconstruction. This is achieved partly by his insistence on taking music as the exemplary signature of the human (rather than the graphic trace, in painting and writing, that Derrida favors). Music is a most instructive means of "inhabiting the tentative," of concentrating a fugitive and contingent "X" (which Steiner is content to speak of as "presence") with a vigorous hermeticism, such that its very concentratedness disposes it to emit aftersparks of presence long after the host has been dispatched. The Hermes which Steiner elects to follow is patron of "the resistance of meaning to mortality." In the unstable world of signifiers which Derrida and Steiner cohabit with equal vigor, it is indeed the (Olsonian) *resistance* which continues to be felt, beyond the contingencies of mortality and the lust after meaning (and its more or lessness).

Mi-Lou: Poetry and the Labyrinth of Desire by Stephen Owen (Harvard University Press)
The concessions to civility, the rhetorical compromises and the masks of subjectivity donned by poetry have enabled it to survive millennia of suspicion, Owen contends. Poems affirm desire in the clandestine mode, eliciting our "hunger for straying," which is invariably transgressive. Owen's concern is that the various defenses *of* poetry mounted from Aristotle through Shelley to the present have become the explanatory means by which we defend ourselves *from* poetry. *Mi-Lou* is not an argument but a series of figures, stroked in prose, festishized in poems, that allow the eruptive potential of Owen's own desire to manifest itself in readings that are useful, eloquent, and (happily) sometimes even aberrant. He writes on seduction/invitation; on the class boundaries of the pastoral mode; on conjugal relations that turn to stone, petrified by desire; on nakedness and fabric as themes that permit a sexist ordination of eroticism to set up shop in the domain of the love lyric. Owen's previous books have all been about T'ang dynasty poetry (on which he is, after Edward Schafer, the preeminent scholar in English). That *Mi-Lou* deals predominantly with Western poetry is perhaps the key weakness, for the labyrinthine conundrums promised by the subtitle don't materialize; it may be that only the cyclical reinvigoration of primary scenes so arduously practiced by Chinese poets is suitable for the phantom sensations of a-mazed displacement. Still, *Mi-Lou* is a most significant exposition of the "interior scene of the song [as] the outer surface of the human heart."

The Telephone Book: Technology, Schizophrenia, Electric Speech by Avital Ronell (University of Nebraska Press)
Ronell is an operator masquerading as caller, as she patches in various voices (Heidegger, Derrida, Freud, Jung, Laing, Alexander Graham Bell)

making collect calls, obscene calls, compounded by calls of conscience and interruptions of call waiting. . .being put on hold, hung up, and having to put up with the tacitly "phony" is what *The Telephone Book* is "about." Ronell's genius is in recognizing that the vocabulary and the metaphysical tautologies of telephonic communication makes a rapturous—almost breathless—white noise against which to refigure Heidegger, who mistakenly assumed he could dial direct to Dasein without aid of an operator, Ma Bell. There is, as Ronell recognizes, an incipient schizophrenia in this desire, so she turns to psychoanalysis to scrutinize the curious historical fact that schizophrenics were among the earliest diehard enthusiasts of the telephone with its "rhetoric of bionic assimilation." Her book is itself an exemplary instance of schizophrenic assemblage, accentuated by a hectic design that reformulates almost every page as a field-composition. The historico-speculative-graphic complex makes the whole apparatus (for it's not quite a book) into a party line, in which complicities are established through overhearing things meant for others, and in which "direct" (i.e. private) communication is subject to interruption by an uninhibited carnival of multiphonics. "Why the telephone? In some ways it was the cleanest way to reach the regime of any number of metaphysical certitudes. It destabilizes the identity of self and other, subject and thing, it abolishes the originariness of site; it undermines the authority of the Book and constantly menaces the existence of literature." Ronell's book is alluringly unauthorized, and seditiously divided into white and yellow pages. Don't hesitate: a call is waiting, as old as the Sirens.

Weinberger:

Susan Howe's *A Bibliography of the King's Book or, Eikon Basilike* takes off from the execution of Charles I, his last word "Remember," and the mysterious book of his writings and prayers that appeared on the day of his death, a forgery that went through countless editions and variations. Howe is out there on her own: an archaeologist amidst the ruin of texts. And she is among many other things, the only innovative working practitioner of "field composition." Olson would never have imagined his true heir. A lovely edition from Paradigm Press, 11 Slater Ave., Providence, RI 02906.

Jerome Rothenberg's *Khurbn & Other Poems* (New Directions). In another genocidal culture, the Aztec, poems and prayers did not invoke: they *were* the spirits of the dead. The author of that chicken-fat *Paradiso, Poland/1931,* now in the limbo of the empty fields of Treblinka 1988, re-

incarnates hell. *Khurbn* is possibly Rothenberg's best poem; a book to read alongside Jabès, Celan, Radnóti and Reznikoff's *Holocaust;* and, as a rectification of names, an antitoxin for our daily exposure to the language of George Bush (who, visiting Auschwitz in 1987, remarked, "Boy, they were big on crematoriums, weren't they?").

When Jacques Roubaud's *Quelque Chose Noir* came out three years ago, it provoked hot debate among French poets, who these days tend to produce works more worthy of cool admiration. Thanks (again) to Rosmarie Waldrop, the book is now available in an excellent English translation, *Some Thing Black.* Roubaud's meditation on the sudden death of his young wife, Alix Cleo Roubaud, is both transgressive and heart-breaking as French post-everything collides with—dare I say it?—human emotion. The beautiful Dalkey Archive Press edition includes some eerie self-portraits by Alix Cleo Roubaud, whose own writings have recently come out in France.

David Hinton's *Selected Poems of Tu Fu* (New Directions) is not only the first extensive selection in English of the greatest Chinese poet, but also an extraordinary attempt to recreate the density of classical Chinese without resorting to pidgin English. For the first time, the wonders of Tu Fu are made plain. Hinton is a rarity, a Sinologist who knows American poetry inside out; this is his first book.

J.P. Seaton's *Love & Time: The Poems of Ou-Yang Hsiu* (Copper Canyon) makes the case for a poet considered to be one of the finest of the Sung Dynasty, but hitherto available only in dull translations. Seaton is one of the most interesting of the new Chinese translators, and this is by far his best book: a tinkling music that, every once in a while, sounds like Zukofsky.

The Reader's Catalog is an annotated list of 40,000 current books—arranged topically to cover all branches of Human Knowledge—which can be ordered through an 800 telephone number. As decent bookstores verge on extinction, this simulacrum of browsing may be all we have left. But the catalog is beautifully designed and brilliantly organized, the selections generally excellent (though necessarily not comprehensive), and the ordering mechanism fairly efficient. (About half of the books are in a warehouse and arrive via UPS in a few days; the rest are back-ordered and take a few weeks to a few months.)

Most startlingly, the *Catalog* is a sneak attack on the poetry establishment, thanks to its general editor Geoffrey O'Brien. The section on 20th Century American poetry omits many of the stars—particularly the younger ones—of Prized Verse, while including, for example, probably every *Sulfur* contributor. All of the better small presses are represented; there are boxes around H.D., Loy, Stein, Riding, the Objectivists, Blackburn, Duncan, O'Hara, Spicer, Berrigan, Corman, Ronald Johnson, Mac

Low, Rothenberg, Don Byrd, Coolidge and Sobin, among others; and the section titled "Contemporaries" features photos of only two poets: Nathaniel Mackey and Leslie Scalapino. Attention shoppers! (The Readers Catalog, 250 West 57th Street, New York, NY 10107. Tel. 1-800-882-8770.)

Clifford:

Coming of Age in New Jersey: College and American Culture, by Michael Moffatt. (New Brunswick, N.J. and London: Rutgers University Press, 1989) At the university where I work, I sometimes glance through a dormitory window. "The Horror!" forms in my throat. Moffatt, an anthropologist who has studied untouchables in South India, did several years fieldwork in a Rutgers dorm. . . and kept his reason. A sensitive, funny, troubling ethnographic essay.

Culture and Truth: the Remaking of Social Analysis, by Renato Rosaldo. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989) Moving between the Ilongot headhunters of the Philippines, Chicano cultural poetics, "imperialist nostalgia," his family's breakfast conversations, the Stanford curriculum struggles. . ., Rosaldo is an engaged, gently passionate scholar. An important book for anthropology: a science coming "home"—to find only borderlands.

Living Arctic: Hunters of the Canadian North, by Hugh Brody. (Vancouver and Toronto: Douglas and McIntyre, 1987) Contains statements like: "I would like to say a few words about this land. The only food I like is meat." (Salluviniq, Resolute Bay) Or: "When an Indian breathes, it's politics." (Cindy Gilday, Yellowknife) Brody and his interlocutors tell local/global histories for the *future.* And miraculously the book's informative chapter on language says nothing about "words" for "snow"!

Storytellers, Saints and Scoundrels: Folk Narrative in Hindu Religious Teaching, Kirin Narayan. (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1989) A portrait of Swamiji, Hindu holy man, by a writer able to travel gracefully between hilarious storytelling sessions in the Guru's modern West Indian apartment and the seminars of Western academe where the talk is of narrative performance, reflexive ethnography, cultural theory. Swamiji makes fun of everyone, including himself. And so does Narayan, with loving sophistication.

The Island Within, by Richard Nelson. (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1989) Personal journal/meditation by a dedicated ethnographer: applied

Athabaskan cosmology: adjectival *corps à corps* with an unihabited Alaskan island. Includes lessons in humility: "I've never watched breaking surf without also studying it, trying to understand what tricks of tide and reef and wind have shaped it. But still, I've only begun to learn. Perhaps there is too much difference between the human mind and the mind of water." Relentlessly literal. Deep looks exchanged with bald eagles.

Public Culture (Bulletin of the Project for Transnational Cultural Studies), Carol Breckenridge, Editor, Arjun Appadurai, Associate Editor. (University Museum, Univ. of Pennsylvania, 19104-6324. $10/year) A small, innovative journal devoted to cultural flows (with eddies and crosscurrents) in an interconnected world-system. Advertising, museums, airports, Rushdie, Mahfouz, po-mo in Japan, the Amnesty International Concert Tour. . .

A Small Place, by Jamaica Kincaid. (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1988) This very angry, lucid essay about neo-colonialism in Antigua was written to spoil your Caribbean holiday.

Perloff:

Dancers on a Plane: Cage. Cunningham. Johns. Preface, "In Memory of My Feelings," by Susan Sontag; essays by Richard Francis, Mark Rosenthal, Anne Seymour, David Sylvester, David Vaughan. London: Anthony d'Offay Gallery, 1989. 165 pp.

The New York Times had reviewed this exhibition in November and I was lucky enough to have one of my friends in London send me the catalogue. I believe it will soon be available in the United States, but in the meantime, it can be ordered directly from the Anthony d'Offay Gallery, Dering Street, London W1 for the price of £18. I don't think Sontag's preface in the form of a prose poem is especially effective since her sensibility is so unlike that of her subjects, but the other essays are informative and, more important, the photography and art work are gorgeous. The Cage entry is the holograph of the 63-page piano part of Cage's *Concert for Piano and Orchestra* (1957–58), which David Sylvester compares to "a set of architectural plans for a particular building" (p. 47), then going on to comment on the pleasures and difficulties of actually *using* Cage's score in performing the work. Sylvester cites Cage's seemingly perverse remark that "A score which is beautiful to look at usually sounds better than one which is not" (50), and goes on to suggest that the visual

representation of the musical piece stresses the "vivid interaction between movements that are formal, rigorous, and movements that are fluid and meandering"—"between the given and the indeterminate." It is a tension, so Sylvester argues, that the performer can then reenact when playing the work.

In the Cunningham section, there are photographs of Merce at Black Mountain in 1948 that are startling in their depiction of a very boyish, seemingly shy young dancer; the last photograph in the group dates from 1981 and shows Merce performing in front of a series of TV monitors; the complex passage from '48 to '81 is conveyed in a series of fascinating images. In the Johns section, Mark Rosenthal relates these images and Cage's Buddhist works to Tantric images (schematic images of testicles at the top edge, vagina at the bottom) in Johns's 1980 *Dancers on a Plane* and related works. What is fascinating for the reader/viewer is that these three great artists really do have a common project, a project that surely has a lot to do—although the essayists don't talk about it—with their sexual "difference," and with the distance and "Eastern" discipline they invoke in coming to terms with it.

It has become a cliché that the avant-garde is dead, that it is impossible, in our belated age, to do anything new and genuinely radical without being co-opted inevitably by the commodity-network. I urge you to read this catalogue and see if you don't change your mind about this "end of the avant-garde." And, for related reading:

John Cage at Seventy-Five, ed. Richard Fleming and William Duckworth (Lewisburg, PA.: Bucknell University Press, 1989), 305 pp. $18.00.

Contains useful interviews and photo essays but the gem here is Deborah Campana's selection of letters between Cage and Pierre Boulez, 1949–1954, based on the manuscripts in the Northwestern University Library. Cage began as a passionate admirer of Boulez and his letters to his French friend are unusually personal and direct. But the two composers came to blows over the issue of chance operations, Cage here being stubbornly secretive about his new methodology ("I have not attempted to tell you about the path of my musical ideas because nothing is very clear yet" (p. 241), but Boulez soon responding that he would never accept "chance as a component of a fully developed work" (p. 241). When this whole correspondence is published it will be a major document differentiating American avant-garde aesthetic from its French counterpart.

Laurie Anderson, *Empty Places,* performed at the Brooklyn Academy of Music in October 1989, at the Wiltern Theatre in Los Angeles on Feb. 11–12, 1990.

Anderson's new performance piece received—unfairly, I think—very mixed reviews. *Empty Places* is not a rock extravaganza like the *United States*, but features Anderson singing—in her own voice this time as well as with synthesizers—and performing her now familiar parodic pieces on living in the U.S., and especially in Manhattan, at this moment in time. The songs and "skits" may not be up to Anderson's earlier work, but what is new is the visual material: Anderson is now using the most elaborate split-screen images, highly complex photographs of animal and plant life, cityscapes, seascapes, computer graphics, collage material based on various new technologies—all of them commenting on and being commented on by her verbal and musical texts. Anderson's images never merely "repeat" a text; on the contrary, the audience spends its time trying to figure out how text and image connect and why we are seeing A while hearing B. I thought it was a genuinely new departure for Anderson and the evening as a whole is completely captivating, my favorite "number" being the one in which Anderson playfully dissects the life of the out-of-work actor/actress in the Village.

Michael Davidson, *The San Francisco Renaissance: Poetics and Community at Mid-Century.* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 248 pp. $34.50.

By no means yet another survey of the Beats or related groups of poets, Davidson's is an elegy for the poetry world that shaped his own consciousness—the San Francisco scene whose "heroes" are Jack Spicer and Robert Duncan, Philip Whalen, Gary Snyder, and Allen Ginsberg. The "idealized bar world" of North Beach, which Davidson reinscribes here, seems to many of us—especially to women readers like myself—like another planet even though Whalen, Snyder, and Ginsberg are part of the present poetry scene as well. Davidson plausibly relates the aggressively macho "Renaissance" men to women poets of the next generation like Judy Grahn and Joanne Kyger, and then speculates on their progeny at the present moment. Although I myself have trouble viewing either Lyn Hejinian or Robert Hass as descendents of this particular movement, Davidson's narrative is not only critically just and compelling, but at its best, say in the first chapter, which deals with the rhetoric and poetics of the 1940s, especially Kenneth Rexroth, this is a brilliant book. I can't imagine a regular *Sulfur* reader who wouldn't find it interesting.

James Laughlin, *Random Essays: Recollections of a Publisher.* (Mt. Kisco, NY: Moyer Bell Ltd., 1989), 272 pp. $18.95.

Many *Sulfur* readers will have heard James Laughlin deliver one or another of the sixteen witty, poignant, memorializing essays in this collection, but reading them as a group, I was struck by their consistency of

tone and the appeal of Laughlin's aesthetic. The key to his particular understanding of Pound and Williams is, I think, his near-perfect ear and his grounding in Greek and Latin poetry. Laughlin is also very candid: read his essay "Translators of the Troubadours: Pound & Paul Blackburn," in which he admits: "Over fifty years of publishing I've made some notable goofs. One of them was that I didn't properly assess Paul Blackburn's versions of the Troubadours when he first showed them to me" (p. 96), and he goes on to note how, for example, Blackburn's decision to let the rhyming of the originals go, made his *Proensa* much more effective. Another candid and moving piece is the essay called "Gists and Piths," in which Laughlin details his stormy relationship with Williams.

Palmer:

Andrew Ross, *No Respect: Intellectuals & Popular Culture,* Routledge, 1989

Andrew Ross's most recent book examines with insight and appropriate wit the ambivalent relationship of conservative and liberal intellectuals to popular culture since the forties, and the ways this relationship almost invariably reflects the dominant post-war ideology of consensual pluralism. At its best, the study is acute and should prove valuable to anyone (all of us?) caught within this bubble. The chapters on "the hip" and on the pornography debate are particularly informative. (Frank O'Hara makes an appearance in the former.) My one reservation, perhaps entirely unfair, is that at points the book feels constrained by its institutional armor, that now familiar, eclectic mix derived from Western Marxism, current critical theory and remnants of post-Structuralism, which threatens to return even the most progressive academic intellectual to his or her parietalized position. It is the place where the "subject," in all of that word's various meanings, is significantly diminished—where certification takes command.

Roberto Fernández Retamar, *Caliban and Other Essays,* University of Minnesota Press, 1989

These essays by the Cuban poet and scholar are essential documents of the anti-colonial, anti-racist cultural struggle. In his navigation logs, Columbus depicts the Carib Indian as "cannibal." The logs provide Montaigne with the source material for his essay, "On Cannibals." Shakespeare then reads his friend John Florio's translation of Montaigne's text and creates Caliban and the island landscape of *The Tempest.* During our time Caliban becomes the central symbol for the dilemma of *mestizo*

culture: how is it possible at once to speak in and subvert the imposed language of the colonizer? One way of course is through this same act of recoding, this (re-)appropriation of Caliban-cannibal-Carib as enacted by Retamar, as well as by Brathwaite, Césaire and many others. Such a reappropriation also exposes the actual mechanism of recoding, whereby the cannibal-colonizers, swallowers of entire peoples, their languages and lands, ascribe their own savagery to their victims:

> For I am all the subjects that you have,
> Which once was mine own king.

J.H. Prynne, *Poems,* Agneau 2, 1982

Jeremy Prynne's *Poems* collects twelve volumes from 1968 through 1979, as well as previously unpublished or uncollected poems and sequences. It is formally exploratory, diverse, learned, lyrical and politically alert writing, and it seems to have gone virtually unnoticed in this country:

> Why do we ask that, as if wind in the
> telegraph wires were nailed up in some
> kind of answer, formal derangement of
> the species. Days and weeks spin by in
> theatres, gardens laid out in rubbish, this
> is the free hand to refuse everything.
>
> (from "L'Extase de M. Poher")

Kristin Ross, *The Emergence of Social Space: Rimbaud and the Paris Commune,* University of Minnesota Press, 1988

Arguably the most original scholarly approach to Rimbaud in the last twenty years, *The Emergence of Social Space* simultaneously examines the "new crowd" of the nineteenth century, the revolutionary space of the Paris Commune, and the origins of radical (anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist) geography. Rimbaud, during the days of the Commune, is seen virtually as a proto-Situationist, choosing vagabondage over labor, absorbing popular lyrics of resistance, and incorporating coded, homoerotic language into a poetry of *dérive* (drift) and *détournement* (diversion, rerouting, seduction, misappropriation).

In 1953, on a wall along the Rue de Seine, would appear the graffiti *NE TRAVAILLEZ JAMAIS* (NEVER WORK). In 1963, a photograph of this graffiti would be published in the *Internationale Situationniste* (v. Greil Marcus, *Lipstick Traces).* In 1968, for a moment, work would once again stop.

CONTRIBUTOR NOTES

KAREN KELLEY'S poems have appeared in *Central Park, Paper Air, Sulfurs #23* and *25*. She lives in Phoenix. BARBARA GUEST'S most recent publication is *Fair Realism,* Sun & Moon, 1989. MARTINE BELLEN'S poems have appeared in *Conjunctions, Central Park, Caliban,* and *Tyuonyi.* HANS BELLMER'S work has received virtually no attention in America; not a single book has been published here with reproductions of his drawings, engravings, photographs, and sculpture. In the late 1970s the Paris magazine *Obliques* did a special 300 page issue on the artist, and in 1983 , Filipachi / Centre George Pompidou brought out a collection of Bellmer photograph reproductions. PETER CHAMETZKY'S translations of Ernst Bloch and Hanns Eisler have appeared in *Critical Texts.* SUSAN FELLEMAN has published on contemporary cinema in *Camera Obscura.* JOCHEN SCHINDLER is a graphic designer who works in Stuttgart. CLAYTON ESHLEMAN is cotranslating César Vallejo's *Trilce* with Julio Ortega. The translation will be published by Eridanos in 1991. HERBERT LUST is the author of a novel, *Violence and Defiance,* and of monographs on Giacometti and Enrico Baj. THERESE LICHTENSTEIN teaches at The University of Hartford, New York University, and The School of Visual Arts. CHRIS CUSTER has recently received an M.A. at San Francisco State University. NUALA ARCHER'S *Whale on the Line* won the 1980 Patrick Kavanagh Poetry Prize in Ireland. MARJORIE WELISH is teaching at Brown University. GUSTAF SOBIN'S novel, *Venus Blue,* will be published by Bloomsbury (London) in 1991. MARJORIE PERLOFF'S most recent book is *Poetic License: Studies in Modernist and Postmodernist Lyric,* Northwestern University Press, 1990. ELIOT WEINBERGER is editing an anthology of American Poetry 1960-1990 for Ediciones del Equilibrista in Mexico. MICHAEL DAVIDSON'S *The San Francisco Renaissance: Poetics and Community at Mid-Century* was recently published by Cambridge University Press. RACHEL BLAU DUPLESSIS' new books are *The Selected Letters of George Oppen* and *The Pink Guitar: Writing as Feminist Practice,* both 1990. ALLEN S. WEISS, a contributing, editor of *Art & Text,* is the author of *The Aesthetics of Excess,* State University of New York Press, 1989. PAOL KEINEG, born and raised in Brittany, arrived in the U.S. fif-

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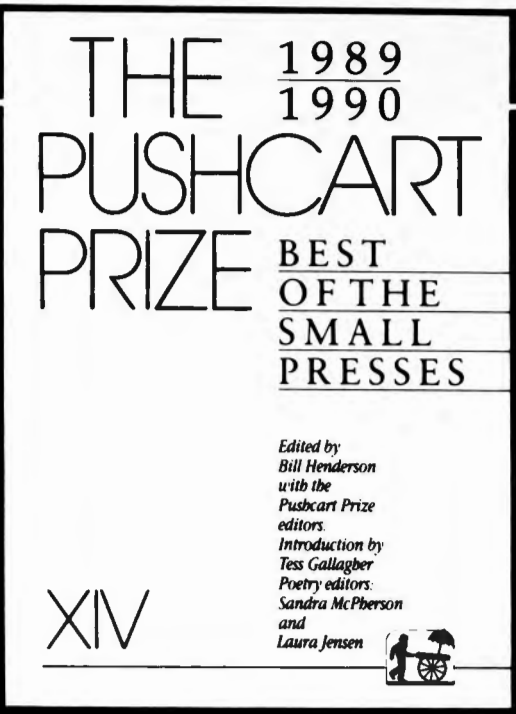

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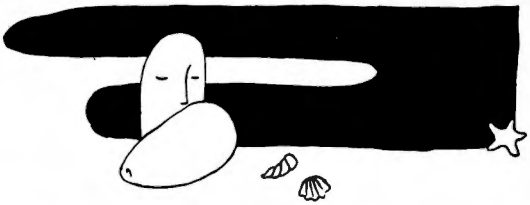

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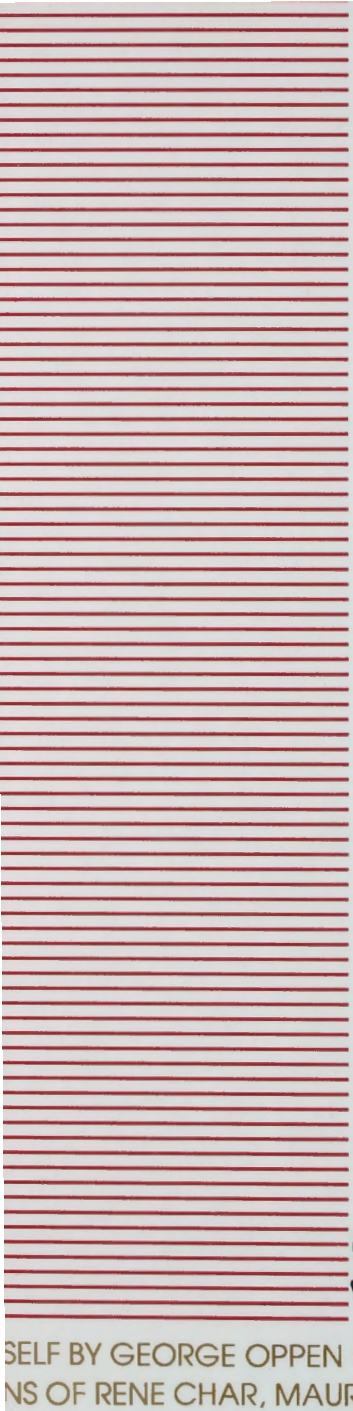

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